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TALKING BACK: AUDIENCE COLLABORATION
AND INTERVENTION IN MODERNIST AND POSTWAR DRAMA

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

When audiences talk back, either by responding or retorting, the line between performers and audience members blurs, bringing into relief the relationship between spectatorship and agency. The dramas of W. B. Yeats, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, and John Arden pursue such a blurring by positioning spectators as collaborators rather than passive bodies upon whom the production works. My study demonstrates how these plays represent a hitherto unrecognized strand of modernist and postwar conceptions of the audience-actor relationship. Auden, for instance, viewed spectators as part of the “troupe,” stating that if “you are seeing and hearing you are co-operating.” Auden’s perspective differs greatly from other modernist theories of audience, many of which seek to divide, shock, or instruct spectators. Instead of examining how modernist alienation manifests itself in the theatre, my study demonstrates how this shift toward active audience involvement occurred during the interwar and immediate postwar eras and thus dramatized newly urgent questions about political participation and ethical responsibility. Whether through intimate staging, direct addresses to the audience, or by bringing spectators onstage, these plays dramatize questions of political and ethical agency while also providing new, invigorating ways for spectators to “co-operate” with the performance. By fully demonstrating the import and lasting influence of this strand, my dissertation posits a new framework for thinking of twentieth-century theatre history: one that focuses on what audiences give to performances instead of what performances require of them.

For Ezra and Jessica

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Introduction

An experimental theatre ought to be regarded as normal and useful a feature of modern life as an experimental laboratory. In both cases not every experiment will be a success; that should neither be expected nor desired, for much is learned from failure.

–W. H. Auden, “Selling the Group Theatre” (1936)

Interwar and early postwar experimental British and Irish drama offered spectators many things, but perhaps the main things they offered were a new notion of spectatorship and an inkling of the potentiality of theatre as a vital “feature of modern life.” I begin with this assertion not merely to re-route these dramas from the dusty, moldy corners of the dead letter office of modernist studies but to offer insight as to some of the general aims of these experimental dramas. The dramas included in this study, while at some times radically different from one another and at other times eerily similar, resemble one another in their general attempts to rethink how spectators view and engage with performances as well as how drama can be staged. Whether speaking of W. B. Yeats’s dance plays and their strange, intimate combinations of the everyday and the ritually strange or the collaborations of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, which seek to position the spectator as a vital collaborator in the production, the performances and texts I discuss cast themselves as a foil to the theatrical status quo.

Auden’s careful diction in “Selling the Group Theatre,” a fundraising pamphlet for the perennially underfunded Group Theatre, indicates the general aims of the dramas that this study examines. In particular, Auden’s use of the term *laboratory* and his constant reiteration of

experimental prove noteworthy. Laboratory, aside being rooted in the post-classical Latin for workplace (*laboratorium*), vestigially carries with it another set of meanings. Laboratory also denotes a place where one works (*labōrāre*) to make a voice heard, to hone that voice into a precise, rhetorically effective tool that can effect change in one's community or society (*ōrātōrius*, the root for oratory). Whether tacitly or directly, all of the performances in this study posit themselves as places where spectators can come together and work *with* the production as well as places where they can begin to hone or, at the very least, begin to contemplate *how* to hone their own political voices both as individuals and as a collective. T. S. Eliot, for example, by recasting spectators as jurists at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), tacitly reminds spectators of their power to claim what Jacques Rancière terms as "the active power of stating and discussing what is just or unjust" while also making them attentive to what sort of collective they constitute (2009, 4).¹ Auden and Isherwood animatedly capture the labor-oratory of theatre via their usage of direct address and by bringing spectators onstage in plays such as *The Dance of Death* (1933), *The Ascent of F6* (1936), and *On the Frontier* (1938).

These theatrical practices that provocatively blur the boundaries between spectators and actors demonstrate how theatre can serve as a dissensual force that "puts two worlds – two heterogeneous logics – on the same stage, in the same world" (11). This blurring of boundaries "challenge[s] the distribution of parts, places, and competences" that govern spectators' daily lives, namely who counts as an actor or as an agent and who serves solely as a passive observer of said actions (11). Although I will discuss the import of Rancière's idea of spectatorship to this

¹ Rancière, in "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," speaks of Aristotle's notion that slaves, "being human beings who are not entirely human beings" possess only "the *aesthesis* of language (the passive capacity of understanding words)" but not the *hexis* of language, which is the "active power" described above (4).

² For a more thorough treatment of experimental troupes, both inside and outside of London, see Andrew Davies'

study's methodology later in this introduction, I cannot over-emphasize the fact that the dramas in this study generally link spectatorship with agency and with dissensual challenges to the sociopolitical status quo.

Experimental, the other term Auden highlights in his pamphlet, demonstrates an interest in something other than gate receipts or the construction of well-made plays. Experimentation, while predicated on tentatively posing questions instead of providing unsubstantiated answers or ideas, also serves as a form of critique. If everyday life ran smoothly and if the frameworks and structures that governed everyday life were equitable and sensible, then there would be precious little need for experimentation. Experiments, after all, are usually conducted to address a lack of knowledge, to test a hypothesis, or to illustrate a known fact to those not in the know. To conduct an experiment, much less to *perform* an experiment, denotes one's dissatisfaction with what is actually known or knowable and with how life is lived currently. By taking up the mantle of the experimental, these dramas lay claim to a certain sort of critique: in viewing experimentation as "a feature of modern life," they provide an immanent critique that seeks to pinpoint the contradictions in modern life while, via their staging practices, indirectly providing alternatives that address and challenge these contradictions. Yeats, for example, found the initial performance of his dance play, *At the Hawk's Well* (1916), rewarding because the performance left the drawing room untouched, meaning that semi-historic Ireland inserted itself into an elaborately decorated Georgian drawing room. This intimate, quotidian domestic space came into contact with the equally intimate, ritualistic strangeness of Yeats's dance play; this moment of contact, of placing these two orders of intimacy paratactically beside one another, demonstrated their inextricable mutuality. Through

an experimental drama, a drama that exists independent of any theatre, Yeats demonstrates new potentialities for what intimacy can entail. The experimental, joined with the laboratorial, thus becomes a mode of critique that presses spectators to find new ways of engaging with and perhaps contributing to the performance.

This is not to say, however, that the plays here – staged outside of traditional theatre spaces, with small, avant-garde troupes, or in venues noted for their treatment of working-class issues and life – represent *the* only sort of experimental interwar theatre. Theatre groups such as Edy Craig's Pioneer Players (1911-1925) combined art theatre with suffragette theatre and Ibsenesque problem plays to campaign for social reforms, whereas the Unity Theatre, London (1936-1975), utilized agitprop street theatre techniques to address both working-class plight and the rise of Fascism. The Merseyside Left Theatre (1930-1944), which later became the Merseyside Unity Theatre, combined contemporary left wing theatre with productions of the theatrical classics, also focused on bringing contemporary sociopolitical issues to a predominantly working-class audience. The Peacock Theatre, founded in 1927 by Dublin's Abbey Theatre, provided a venue for experimental and expressionist drama; Georg Kaiser's expressionistic drama *From Morning to Midnight*, staged by Ashley Dukes's troupe, the New Players, was the theatre's inaugural performance on 13 November 1927. Dukes later founded the Mercury Theatre (1933) to produce new drama and to serve as the home of the Ballet Rambert, which was run by his wife, Marie Rambert. The Mercury produced many of the plays discussed in this study and served as one of the many loci for new dramas in interwar London. Although a thorough discussion of each of these troupes goes far beyond the scope of this study, these troupes demonstrate the vibrancy of interwar experimental theatre and show that experimental

theatre was not solely a London affair.² I take this vibrancy as a given in order to focus on a few select plays that provide a compelling counter-reading to how interwar experimental dramas had an impact on spectators. Instead of providing an historical account of the varied theatrical movements and developments afoot in the interwar years, I focus on a selection of plays whose initial productions posited a different sort of relationship with their spectators.

What is significant about the plays discussed in this study, many of which were produced by The Group Theatre (1932-1939) or by those tangentially affiliated with it, is *how* they conducted their theatrical experiments. Much like the productions put on by Nigel Playfair's earlier Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (1918-1932), the performers in these plays "did not ignore the audience but instead made them a partner, seemingly a minor alteration but in fact flying in the face of the 'Fourth Wall' convention of naturalism" (Davies 1987, 91).³

Although suffragette drama resembles some of the dramas in this study given their lack of props and low production costs, the fact remains that suffragette dramas' entire focus was on the spreading of pro-suffrage sentiment and educating spectators. Echoing Shaw's preface to *Pygmalion* (1914), these plays revolved around being "so intensely and deliberately didactic" in order to replace spectators' ignorance with a deeper, more careful understanding of the issues

² For a more thorough treatment of experimental troupes, both inside and outside of London, see Andrew Davies' *Other Theatres* (1987) and his discussion of troupes such as the People's Theatre of Newcastle, the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich, and the Festival Theatre in Cambridge, as well as the Gate Theatre in Covent Garden, London. Also see Norman MacDermott's *Everymania: The History of the Everyman Theatre Hampstead* (1975) and Jane Baldwin's discussion of the London Theatre Studio (1935-1939) in her *Michel Saint-Denis and the Shaping of the Modern Actor* (2003) for a close examination of two London-based experimental troupes.

³ The key difference between the Lyric and the Group is that the former specialized primarily in eighteenth-century drama; Playfair's revival of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) had an impressive three-year run. Rupert Doone's The Group Theatre, however, focused primarily on new play development.

discussed in the play (6).⁴ In turn, the work of the Unity Theatre engaged with the ideas of Bertolt Brecht, which is not surprising given their production of Brecht's *Señora Carrara's Rifles*, the earliest known Brecht play performed on a British stage. Also, through their use of the "Living Newspaper" form, the Unity Theatre incorporated the ideas of Hallie Flanagan, Erwin Piscator, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Vladimir Mayakovsky into their productions. Unity, much like Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre of Action (1934) and Theatre Union (1936), utilized the impassioned rhetoric of political declamation in their productions. Spectators became overwhelmed by this declamatory rhetoric, with the play "deafening the audience with slogans" (Samuel, MacColl, and Cosgrove 1985, 248) and oftentimes becoming "effective recruiting propaganda" (Chambers 1989, 85) for the ideas expressed in the play. The plays in this study seek neither to educate nor overwhelm spectators; instead, they view and position spectators as people capable of working *with* the production, seeing them not as ignorant observers or green recruits but as vital, necessary contributors to the performance.

This adamant insistence on seeing spectators as necessary parts of the production resembles the theories on spectatorship formulated by Jacques Rancière in texts such as *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) and *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009). Although primarily considered a visual theorist, Rancière has written extensively on the literary and often uses theatrical metaphors as a means to describe his political ideas; even while describing his notion of political interlocution, he states how "In politics, subjects act to create a *stage* on which problems

⁴ It would be hard to overstate the Shavian influence upon the Pioneer Players, given Shaw served on the troupe's advisory committee and that one of its first productions (June 1912) was a private production of Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. See James Fisher's "Edy Craig and the Pioneer Player's Production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*" (1995) for more information on this production.

can be made visible – a scene with subjects and objects, in full view of a ‘partner’ who does not ‘see’ them” (2004, 7, emphasis mine). Rancière’s interest in spectatorship and his keen, nuanced attentiveness to its potential seems less surprising given his interest in how political disagreement is *staged* by subjects and the processes by which this staging makes *visible* certain inequalities. As I will show below, to be a spectator is to contribute to this making visible. Examining Rancière’s formulation of spectatorship, then, will make clear the import and potential effects of the plays in this study’s attempts to redefine the role of audience members.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière links emancipation with spectatorship, noting that the former begins “when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection” (13). Rancière explains what emancipation entails in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, likening it to the pedagogical theories of Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840), a former *révolutionnaire* who had to leave his post for Belgium after the Second Restoration in 1815. In 1818, Jacotot taught French to Flemish students at the University of Louvain despite their knowing no French and him knowing no Flemish. Jacotot’s experiences cause him to create a notion of “intellectual emancipation,” which states that one does not need specialized knowledge in order to teach nor does a student need explication to learn; this emancipation, in short, is a belief that all people are equally intelligent. Rancière builds on Jacotot’s pedagogy to make a general point about emancipation: “One need only learn how to be equal men in an unequal society. That is what *being emancipated* means” (133). He later links this drive for equality as one of the “two heterogeneous processes” that constitute “the political” since emancipation is “a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone

is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition" (1992: 58). Spectatorship, Rancière notes, is an inherently *active* process, an active process with emancipatory sociopolitical potential since

[spectatorship] is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else....Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. There is no more a privileged form than there is a privileged starting point. Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance [between the *cognoscenti* and the ignorant], secondly the distribution of roles [that inequally order society], and thirdly the boundaries between territories [of those who can act and those who can only look] (17).

I quote from *The Emancipated Spectator* at length because it demonstrates how spectatorship, as an active process, also becomes an instance where one can refuse the unequal processes that order society into those capable of action and those who are only fit for passivity. I find his use of the term "capacity" particularly interesting because it does not only denote the power to do or to understand something; in an industrial sense, "capacity" denotes the power to produce something, to operate at full capacity, and in an electrical sense, it denotes the power of an object to store an electrical charge, as in the work of a capacitor. Spectatorship, Rancière suggests, *makes something happen or creates such an impression that it allows for something to happen later*. Certain modes of spectatorship are akin to an event, a rupture in the status quo, but with a

key difference: it is not a rupture so much as instantiation of the dissensual. It is not a “privileged starting point” but instead a fertile and striking place where dissensus could make itself manifest.⁵ The reason behind spectatorship’s notable capacity might reside in how the “spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets.....She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way” (2009, 13). To be a spectator, Rancière implies, is to be a participant, to be an active maker and shaper of meaning.

While it might seem that all forms of spectatorship possess this power, Rancière clearly outlines what sorts of spectatorship possess emancipatory power. As Rancière states in a 2008 interview with Anne Marie Oliver, “art emancipates or literature emancipates when it doesn’t tell us how to use art or literature – how we have to understand, how we have to see, how we have to read, and what we have to understand” (181). This idea goes beyond the simple notion that art cannot emancipate when it pontificates; instead, Rancière sees emancipation in terms of methodology. It is the methodology through which cultural products engage their readers or spectators that determine whether they possess emancipatory potential. The dramas in this study possess this potential because of the methods by which they engage spectators. These dramas directly address the audience, seek to incorporate audience members into the performance, or are staged in intimate venues with hardly any distance between actors and spectators. While many experimental and avant-garde troupes utilized similar theatrical devices in their productions, the manner in which they used them differed.. As I stated previously, what

⁵ A great deal of Rancière’s writing focuses on his notion of dissensus, which he elaborates in his *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010), which argues that “The essence of politics is dissensus” (38), as dissensus is “a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we sense something is given” (69). Consensus, he argues, reduces the scope of the political space and thereby reduces politics to the police order. Police, however, refers not to uniformed officers but to any ordering or distributing of “the sensible” – what is visible, what counts, what is iterable, and the like. One can never just have politics; politics always gives way to a new police order. What one has is a perpetual police order punctuated by occasional political moments that push for a reshaping of this order.

separates these plays from their contemporaries was *how* they conducted their theatrical experiments. As I will show below, these dramas allowed audiences to experiment with different types of spectatorship, turning the theatre space into an experimental laboratory for testing what sorts of interactions and interpretations possessed emancipatory potential.

While the plays of Yeats, Auden, Isherwood, Eliot, and John Arden have many surface-level differences, they all focus more upon what spectators, under certain conditions, give *to* the performance instead of what they receive *from* a performance. As I briefly mentioned in the prior paragraph and will demonstrate throughout this study, this differs greatly from other, even similarly experimental, contemporaneous dramas' view of spectators and their manner of engaging spectators. Returning to my earlier discussion of the theatre as an experimental laboratory, each of these plays views itself as a laboratory committed to discovering something new about spectatorship. It might be appealing to see these plays as a response to Allardyce Nicoll's complaint in his *The English Theatre* (1936) that "a darkness of now outworn tradition hangs over the greater part of the professional theatre....No art may flourish so long as it remains stagnant. Experimentation spells movement at least, and the English theatre, lacking the spirit for experimentation, is artistically and mentally moribund" (188). I, however, view these plays as having a somewhat less grandiose aim (188). While these plays do at times explicitly or implicitly critique the stale, hackneyed traditionalism of the commercial theatre, these plays' primary investment is in finding a new way of defining what a "spirit for experimentation" meant to interwar spectators. As I have stated repeatedly, these plays remain much more interested in *how* theatrical experiments affected spectators than in the experiments themselves.

My interest in particular texts as opposed to entire movements or theatrical troupes differs from the standard critical approaches to twentieth-century experimental drama, which typically focuses on individual troupes or distinct movements. I chose to focus on these specific texts because doing so provides an opportunity to see how several different playwrights envision what this “spirit for experimentation” entailed. In this respect, my critiques depart from those found in Andrew Davies’ *Other Theatres* (1987), which traces the relationship between West End Theatre and alternative and experimental theatres, and Claire Warden’s *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (2012), which attempts to “unite [the larger experimental theatre] groups under a single banner while maintaining a strong sense of diversity” (Warden 9). Additionally, while many of the plays mentioned here were performed by the Group Theatre or at Ashley Dukes’s Mercury Theatre, I do not focus on one theatre troupe or one stage alone. This is a conscious decision on my part, as doing so would unnecessarily delimit my study and would only show how one group of like-minded theatre practitioners grappled with what “the spirit for experimentation” meant in their day.

Selecting a single troupe or theatre would also transgress the Rancièrian methodology that I outlined previously, as the point is not finding a group of certain theatre practitioners and using them as “a privileged starting point” but instead realizing that “there are starting points [everywhere], intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new” (Ranciè 2009: 17). After all, one of the aims of this study is to demonstrate how 1930s experimental drama truly captured the multiplicity of “starting points” mentioned above. While studies such as Peter Billingham’s *Theatres of Conscience 1939-1953: A Study of Four Touring British Community*

Theatres (2012), Colin Chambers's *The Story of the Unity Theatre* (1989), Howard Goorney's *The Theatre Workshop* (1981), Robert Leach's *Theatre Workshop* (2006), Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove's *Theatres of the Left 1880-1935* (1985), Michael Sidnell's *Dances of Death: The Group Theatre in London in the Thirties* (1984), and scores of other texts all demonstrate the important and groundbreaking work done by various interwar and postwar companies, this manuscript attempts something different. Instead of providing an historical account or attempting to prove that these companies, despite their varying interests, "had more in common than one might suppose" (Warden 10), *Talking Back* focuses less on the movements – and the theatre practitioners behind these movements – and more upon the spectators to whom these companies addressed. As I have stated previously, the goal of this study is to demonstrate how the dramas of Yeats, Auden, Isherwood, Eliot, and Arden can constitute a counter-reading to how twentieth-century experimental drama had an impact on spectators.

This interest in spectatorship, much like its interest in certain representative texts instead of companies, separates *Talking Back* from existing scholarship on interwar and postwar experimental drama. Throughout this study, I repeatedly link my findings with one of the most growing fields in theatre scholarship, audience studies. Audience studies grows out of the pioneering work of scholars like Susan Bennett, Herbert Blau, and Erika Fischer-Lichte, amongst others, and bears no small resemblance to the theories of Rancière that I discussed previously. Bennett acknowledges these similarities, stating that her emphasis in *Theatre Audiences* (1997) on the "challenges, practices, and ideologies of what we then called 'alternative' theatres....[resembled] what Jacques Rancière would later call the 'emancipated spectator'" (2012, 8). Audience studies focuses on how the "act of theatre-going can be a

significant measure of what culture affords to its participants” (Bennett 1997, vii). It is also predicated on the “belief in a connection between audience participation and political empowerment” (Freshwater 2009, 3), a belief that many of these plays at times agrees with and at other times eyes with suspicion. Spectatorship, as Fischer-Lichte notes, revolves around “the focus of our attention shift[ing] to the very process of [the] construction [of reality] and the conditions underlying it,” making the theatre a space where new ways of acting and observing can help spectators develop new ways of becoming more capable, more agential sociopolitical beings (1997, 72). This study’s use of audience studies as an avenue for critical inquiry should come as no surprise given that these plays see themselves as labor-oratories where one either works to hear her voice heard or works to hone that voice into a precise, dissensual force. There has yet to be a text that examines the plays of this era and their method of experimentation through the lens of audience studies’s interest in spectatorship. *Talking Back* aims to fill that gap.

The potential development of new ways of doing and being explains my usage of the term *experimental* instead of other monikers such as *avant-garde* or *alternative* theatre. After all, experiments denote a lack of knowledge or an attempt to test a hypothesis’s veracity. To be deemed experimental means to court failure just as much as to reach for success given that “not every experiment will be a success” (Auden 1996, 134). Also, laboratory work remains predicated, to some degree, on group effort: one person alone does not a laboratory make. A laboratory, generally speaking, requires various persons with various skills in order for experiments to be conducted properly. Everyone, simply put, contributes something. The very term *experimental* captures this need for, and expectation of, people collaborating and intervening as the situation deems in a way *avant-garde* or *alternative* cannot. Alternative

seemingly creates an unnecessary bifurcation between popular culture and the literary, a bifurcation that many of these dramas challenge through their engagement with the everyday and, as is the case with the plays of Eliot, Auden, and Isherwood, through their use of popular song and music. Avant-garde apparently privileges theatre professionals above all others whereas experimental is a more contingent term that carries with it an “evocation of equality” (Rancière 1995, 47). Anyone, at any time, can begin an experiment or rethink an existing process, regardless of whether she is a playwright, an actor, a designer, or a spectator. Experiments do not require one to be part of a movement; one needs only a desire to respond to a lack of knowledge or to test a given fact’s veracity.

Using the term experimental also affords me the use of two other closely related terms: collaboration and intervention. I would like to explain my choice of terms, which will allow me to reiterate my theoretical intervention into these plays as well as clarify the novelty and import of how these plays rethink spectatorship. Just as experiments denote a lack of knowledge, they also serve as critiques of everyday life in that one conducts an experiment in order to address an aporia. As such, experiments can be seen as interventions meant to address and perhaps correct shortcomings in the structures that govern everyday life. As interventions, experiments serve as a venue where “problems can be made visible...in full view of [one] who does not ‘see’ them” (Rancière 2004, 7). As noted in the prior paragraph, collaboration figures into this study because any laboratory requires various people with various skills working together towards a shared aim. As Auden stated in the manifesto, “7 Points about the Group Theatre” (1933), theirs was a “troupe, not of actors only” but of a variety of theatre professionals as well as the “AUDIENCE” because even if “you are not moving or speaking, you are not therefore a passenger. If you are

seeing and hearing you are co-operating” (1988, 491). The audience has a role to play, and that role manifests itself in the audience’s need to collaborate with and intervene in the performance.

Talking Back builds on this linking of collaboration, intervention, and experimentation by looking at (1) the ways that these plays encourage or prompt spectators to collaborate with the production or insert themselves into the production and (2) how experimental drama is oftentimes predicated upon collaboration and intervention. This collaboration can be responding to direct address, responding to the staging, intervening in the production by coming onstage, or being cast as arbiters or jurists of the dramatic action. Instead of being distant from the goings-on of the stage, spectators are close by, oftentimes within arm’s reach of the players, while also being on the same spatial level as the dramatic action (many of these plays do not have actors performing on an aproned stage). Instead of being spoken *to* and remaining voyeurs *of* the dramatic action, spectators were recast as vital members of the theatre company, members whose contributions were necessary in ensuring the production’s success. Instead of being seen as a disparate group of people who lacked specialized knowledge, spectators were entrusted with collaborating together to form binding, just judgments. Each of the plays in this study allows and encourages spectators to respond through one of these methods.

As I have stated throughout, this approach differs from other experimental dramas’ theories of audience, which focused on instructing spectators or overwhelming them, as well as from commercial dramas’ idea of audiences, which often viewed spectators as people in need of entertainment. Even a theorist with as keen a sense of audience such as Bertolt Brecht, whose didactic *Lehrstück* drama was “a collaboration [that] develops between participant and

apparatus, in which expression is more important than accuracy," differed a great deal from these dramatists (1964, 31). Brecht, as he states in his 1933 notes to *Die Mutter*, "Indirect Impact of the Epic Theatre," sees his drama as valuable not only because of its ability to teach spectators but also because "It divides its audience" (60); its primary value, then, comes not from what it affords spectators but what it does *to* spectators. Viewing spectators in such a way runs counter to the dramas and theories of audience present in this study.

I see collaboration and intervention as vital, necessary forces because, absent these opportunities to collaborate or intervene, there would be precious little for the spectator to do. While I undoubtedly agree with Rancière's general point that spectatorship is an inherently active process, I am also intrigued as to what sorts of actions the inherent activeness of spectatorship can elicit. The unicity of the plays in this study revolves around how they all provide a way of making the inherent activity of spectatorship visible. Even if the production utilizes plants to make its points about collaboration and intervention, the effect does not diminish since the point is just as much the making manifest of that which is latent as it is getting the audience to participate. By being constructed around opportunities that make visible the potentiality of spectatorship, these dramas demonstrate that, as Peter Handke said in his experimental drama *Offending the Audience* (1966): "You [the spectator] are the centre. You are the occasion. You are the reasons why" (21). They do this while also showing the ways that spectators respond to and contribute to "the reasons" that govern their relationship with the production.

While I have demonstrated how *Talking Back* corresponds and counters existing scholarship on experimental drama and how it draws from recent developments in audience

studies, I also find it necessary to speak briefly about how my readings of these texts differ from existing readings. Throughout this introduction, I have emphasized how I do not wish to unite these dramas under a single grouping but instead wish to demonstrate how several early twentieth-century experimental dramas rethink the audience-actor relationship.⁶ The dramas discussed in this study are either written entirely in verse or contain a great deal of verse in them. As such, they are often seen as being part of a poetic drama revival that was “a reaction against the conventional realism of current commercial theatre writing” (Leeming 1989, 2) and was an attempt to “restore drama to its original power, evoking a sacred presence with all the devices of ceremony, dance, poetry and scenery – a ritual” (Hinchcliffe 1977, 21). While I agree with Raymond Williams’s assessment that “these plays have a more than temporary importance” (1968, 199) and that they might be a place where the “solution” to the limitations of realist, naturalist drama “can be envisaged,” I remain wary of grouping such a disparate set of experimental texts under a single movement (1965, 246).⁷ That verse is used and oftentimes “is operating as structure” in these plays remains less the point (Blau 1957, 33). For the line of inquiry taken in this study, I find it more useful to examine *how* that structure engineers a certain impact on spectators.

Instead of seeing verse as the primary, defining characteristic that yokes these plays together, throughout this study, I examine how each of these playwrights use verse to achieve

⁶ While I realize that the very act of selecting texts implies a certain sort of grouping, I am not cobbling together a new sort of movement, as Claire Warden does in *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (2012), nor am I viewing these dramas as part of a larger movement, as do Andrew Davies in *Other Theatres* (1987) and Glenda Leeming in *Poetic Drama* (1989).

⁷ A variety of texts saw this poetic drama revival as *the* next trend in theatre, including Ashley Dukes’s *The Scene is Changed* (1942), Allardyce Nicoll’s “Naturalism or Poetry” (1938), J. C. Trewin’s *The Dramatists of Today* (1953), Denis Donoghue’s *The Third Voice* (1959), and George Steiner’s *The Death of Tragedy* (1961). The radicalizing of the theatre following the 1956 success of plays like *Look Back in Anger* is largely seen as marking the demise of poetic drama.

different effects. Yeats uses verse to create a ritualistic atmosphere, ritual being an occurrence where the dividing lines between spectator and participant blur in provocative ways. As Steven Putzel rightly states, the actions and verses of the musicians in Yeats's dance plays "help define the role that spectators will play" in the drama (1991, 120). As Yeats argued in "The Theatre" (1900), the theatre "began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty," which suggests that he sees this ritualistic relationship as something restorative for theatre (125). Absent ritual, the theatre will continue to be populated by "Little whimpering puppets" moving about purposelessly on the stage (Yeats 2003, 71).

Auden starkly differs from Yeats in that he tends to mix verse genres in his dramas, either ceaselessly shifting from high poetic diction to something doggerel and vaudevillian or combining them to, as Edward Mendelson states in his introduction to *Auden's Plays* (1988), "unite extremes of symbolic intensity with extravagant burlesque...[that] shattered the rules of decorum that prevailed in English verse drama when Auden began writing" (xiv). This shattering caused by the mixing of verse types as well as by mixing verse and prose created, as *The Times* reviewer stated, an "expressive and agreeable theatrical form" (1935, 12) that allows for interactions between spectatorial "crowds and [acting] choruses" (1935, 26). Both Yeats and Auden utilize verse to blur the line between spectator and actor, but the effect of that blurring – the creation of a ritualized atmosphere and the creation of a venue to critique the political status quo – remain miles apart. Granted, one can argue that these plays engage with popular culture and traditional forms, from Greek drama to Shakespearean drama, reshaping and fragmenting them so as to capture and critique their own historical moment; however, that seems to be what makes these dramas modernist, not what makes them their own niche of modernism. As such,

arguing that these different uses of verse constitute a movement or revival runs the risk of not adequately recognizing the particularity of each of these dramatic (and poetic) experiments. What we have, then, is less a verse drama movement and more an assortment of dramas that use verse to elicit and invite a varied register of responses from spectators. The value of this study resides in its being able to look at a variety of texts and not just one specific school of thought or performing company; doing so, I believe, will provide a more compelling and well-rounded counter-reading of how twentieth-century experimental dramas affect and engage spectators.

Given its focus on variety, the framework of *Talking Back* permits a sustained engagement with some of the most interesting and novel formal and performative innovations of early twentieth-century experimental drama. In short, this study will combine a sustained, comprehensive examination of how certain dramatic experiments were conducted with a survey of a relatively diverse set of experiments over a 40-year period. I have focused on the works of five different playwrights to allow for a detailed close reading of these texts, their staging practices, and an examination into their reception by spectators and critics. Also, choosing playwrights as different as Yeats, Auden, Isherwood, Eliot, and Arden should ensure that a wide range of dramatic experiments is covered.

Chapter 1 looks at the dance plays of W. B. Yeats, in particular his *At the Hawk's Well* (1916). As mentioned previously, these strange, ritualistic plays took drama outside of the theatre, as Yeats intended for them to be performed in salons, drawing rooms, and other intimate venues. Particularly illuminating are the ways in which Yeats's attempts to blur boundaries and thus put "two worlds – two heterogeneous logics – on the same stage, in the

same world” can be read as attempts to show how the quotidian and the ritualistically strange often intersect (Rancière 2009, 11). While Yeats often stated that his dance plays were an attempt to step away from the political – the Abbey and demands on his time and intellect were beginning to wear on him – one can nonetheless read an enormous social potentiality into his attempts to rethink what constitutes intimacy and how intimacy manifests itself. This chapter shows how Yeats’s experiments challenge the way spectators think about props and what is proper to or proprietary to the stage, while also suggesting how spectators contribute to the drama. At the heart of this chapter is Yeats’s notion of intimacy and the import he accords to it as well as the ways that this focusing on intimacy helps spectators develop different ways of dramatic seeing and feeling.

Chapter 2 discusses W. H. Auden’s *The Dance of Death* (1933) and his 1936 collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, *The Ascent of F6*. This chapter focuses first on how the staging of *Dance* builds off of Yeats’s call for intimacy by casting the audience members as part of the performance “troupe,” demonstrating his belief that spectators can substantively contribute to the performance. Auden and Isherwood, by making visible the ways that spectators contribute to performances, thus “challenge the distributions of parts, places, and competences” that govern audience members’ daily lives (Rancière 2009, 11). Whereas Yeats focuses on “heterogeneous logics” colliding, Auden and Isherwood focus on what Rancière, in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006), terms the “distribution of the sensible,” demonstrating how

literary locutions....define models of speech or action but also regimes of sensible intensity. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of

doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies (Rancière 2006, 39).

In short, Auden and Isherwood make visible how the sensible is distributed and point towards the productive political potentiality inherent in the rethinking and restaging of these modes of being, saying, doing, and making. This chapter continues by examining the second collaboration between Auden and Isherwood, *F6*, in order to demonstrate what happens when the sociopolitical and ethical frameworks used while collaborating or promoting change oftentimes prove incapable of addressing or dealing with pressing social, political, and ethical issues. The question of how collaboration occurs and what sorts of leadership ensured and allowed for successful collaborations were key issues in the 1930s, key issues that these dramas address.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how T. S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* (1928) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) revolve around the idea and practice of collaboration. *Sweeney*, Eliot's most daring theatrical experiment, dramatizes what prevents collaboration and a sense of community/commonality from taking root despite being staged in a way that casts spectators as chorus members. In *Murder*, Eliot demonstrates how collaboration can easily become complacent, self-serving complicity with hegemonic political forces: the assassins of Thomas Becket directly address the audience, claiming that the spectators enjoy the "state of affairs" brought about by the "just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the State" (217-218). As a result, the assassins state that the audience "must share...any guilt whatever in the matter" (218). Eliot suggests that any failure to respond results from a dearth of shared, communal experiences as well as a self-serving willingness to maintain the status quo.

Eliot thus anticipates the transformation of collaboration during World War II into a byword for betrayal, and asks whether solidarity can be independent of political processes. Eliot thus shows the confrontation between consensus, which privileges the established order, and the dissensual. As Rancière demonstrates in his *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2009), “consensus...defines a mode of symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus” (115). While I would not claim Eliot as a thinker acutely sympathetic to the dissensual, Eliot nonetheless is concerned with what is left out, what is not counted – and why – when communities attempt to form or reform themselves. Ignoring the traces we leave out, the things we gloss over, makes us all the more complicit, Eliot argues.

My final chapter examines how John Arden’s dramas refuse to “provide the theatrical reward” hoped for and instead provide “a dialogue of waiting, accusation, and revelation – [which] is not enough” (Bruster 1995, 46). Arden recognizes the shift in meaning to words like collaboration, intervention, and solidarity after the war, calling attention instead not to the act of collaborating or intervening but to the methodology that underwrites and substantiates these acts. Just as the interruption of a true dissensual moment always gives rise to a new distribution of the sensible, what Arden suggests is paying keen attention to the ways that this new distribution occurs. Arden, by giving spectators “not enough,” prompts them to find different ways of thinking through collaboration and intervention; the transformative, for Arden, almost always remains unnamed, forever around the corner waiting to be chanced upon. Arden sees the lack of “a simple answer....[as being] the natural situation in life” and structures his plays accordingly (1965, 7). Arden challenges spectators by placing them in the role of judge at the end of *Armstrong’s Last Goodnight* (1964), prompting them to “read the varieties of dishonour,

and determine in your mind how best ye can avoid whilk ane of them and when" (248).

Spectators, Arden suggests, despite not being given enough, are oftentimes capable of doing far more expected. The trick, he implies – perhaps borrowing from Jacotot – is providing them with the means and then simply leaving them well enough alone to do it.

I close with a brief mention of the title of this study, *Talking Back*. When I was younger, talking back was something at which I was quite adept. Although it tested the patience of my parents, something more was going on. It was more than simple defiance; it was a way of testing and learning limits, an attempt to understand and redefine said limits. In theatre terminology, talk back has a different meaning entirely. A talk back denotes an informal question and answer session at the end of a performance where audience members can talk with cast and crew. As such, it allows patrons to know what goes into a production and allows the cast and crew to learn what was particularly effective about that night's performance. At its best, a talk back is an exchange geared towards serving the play, where theatre professionals hear what spectators learned from the play and spectators, if they are paying close enough attention to the facilitator's questions, learn what the cast and crew had hoped to accomplish as well as the feelings and thoughts they hoped the production would elicit. A talk back creates another dialogue about the play, as it makes visible for spectators what sorts of collaboration and choices go into putting a play onstage and provides the cast and crew with an idea of how their show affected spectators and in what ways. The plays in this study combine both elements of talking back. They push the limits of what spectatorship can entail while also creating

opportunities for spectators to serve the play by casting them – whether through staging, direct address, or bringing them onstage – in it.

1. Reviving Intimacy: The Staging of W. B. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well*

Thereafter [the initial performance of *At the Hawk's Well*], one saw Yeats rather as a more eminent contemporary than as an elder from whom one could learn...[and not] a minor survivor of the '90's

–TS Eliot, "Ezra Pound" (1946)

April 2, 1916, the date of the first production of WB Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* in Lady Cunard's drawing room, is not a date etched into cultural memory. And how could it be? A few dozen people at the most attended the performance of this ritualistically strange and relatively short salon drama, an audience size keeping with Yeats's earlier desire to develop both an "aristocratic form...[with] no need of a mob or press" to survive (*Early Essays* 163) and a drama where the performers are "within arm's reach of their audience" (*Variorum* 1305).¹ Yet, for the few literati who attended, the performance carried with it a resonance whose register the commercial theatre could not match.

This resonance, however, did not come from the plot alone since *At the Hawk's Well* contains a relatively simple, spare one: a Young Man (Cuchulain) finds himself on a remote island that contains a well whose waters grant immortality to the one who drinks from it. An Old Man attends this well and has for fifty years, waiting for its water to pool up; however, every time the water pools up the otherworldly Guardian of the Well causes the man to fall asleep. Tantalized by the prospect of immortality, the man has spent his entire life waiting for the opportunity to drink from the well. Cuchulain, also entranced by the Guardian, misses the water pooling up; however, he hears the call of battle and refuses to remain waiting with the

¹ I will refer to *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume IV: Early Essays* as *EE*, followed by the corresponding page number.

Old Man. The play's action ends with his rushing out to meet battle and, presumably, achieve immortality by heroic action as opposed to waiting. The characters' actions and movements are narrated and accompanied by three musicians playing a gong, zither, and drum.

At the Hawk's Well resonated with audiences because of its staging and clever use of props as well as the opportunities it afforded audiences. An intimate drama presented for a small audience, it was shown, made possible a great deal more than what Yeats could achieve at the Abbey Theatre. Many critics, after all, had begun to lament the experimental turn Yeats's dramas had taken since 1900, as evidenced by Brinsley MacNamara's statements in "The Abbey Theatre: Is It on the Decline?" (1913): "The halo has fallen from the head of Mr Yeats. His gesture has lost its eloquence" (5) and Joseph Holloway's critique of how the "childish ideas [of director-designer Gordon Craig]² give [Yeats] keen delight now" (146).³ A great deal of skepticism and a lack of public interest initially greeted these works, from his psaltery experiments with Fay, Farr and Dolmetsch in the early 1900s to the introduction of farce and avant-garde staging into plays like *On Baile's Strand* (1904) and *Deirdre* (1907), respectively.⁴ T. S. Eliot, who attended the première, said that the performance so impressed him that "thereafter one saw Yeats rather as a more eminent contemporary than as an elder from whom one could

² Edward Gordon Craig, an avant-garde director and designer whose aesthetic outlook was heavily influenced by Symbolism influenced Yeats's dramaturgy in significant ways but none more so than Yeats's ideas of acting and scenery/set design. Gordon Craig, in essays like "The Actor and the Uber-Marionette" argued that "To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague....They make all art impossible" (79).

³ While Holloway and MacNamara's opinions represent the dominant view of Yeats's dramatic development, Yeats's experiments did reach more sympathetic ears. The poet-playwright Austin Clarke remembers Yeats's late Abbey poetic dramas and states that while "the theatre was almost empty....[with] few people in the stalls," the plays "were a deeply imaginative experience" even though "poetic drama was slowly vanishing from the Abbey Theatre" (20).

⁴ Eliot, in "A Foreign Mind" (1919), his review of Yeats's essay collection *The Cutting of an Agate*, remained critical of Yeats's esoteric leanings, stating that "the difference between Yeats's world and ours is so complete as to seem almost a physiological variety, different nerves and senses." This echoes Louis MacNeice's later critique, in *Modern Poetry* (1941), of Yeats's being "a spiritualist, a hankerer for yoga, a malinger in fairyland" (81).

learn” as opposed to his being “a minor survivor of the ‘90’s” (1946: 326). Eliot, after beginning his own foray into drama, would later add in “Yeats” (1940) that “Yeats had nothing [to serve as an example for verse plays], and we have had Yeats....[we] can see now that even the imperfect early attempts he made are probably more permanent literature than the plays of Shaw” (256). Yeats’s dramaturgy, then, far from being built upon “childish ideas,” played a key role in shaping later dramatists’ ideas of actors, blocking, set design, costuming, and staging.⁵

Yeats’s experimental dance plays thus serve as the beginning of a new strand of modernist drama, one that has been heretofore glossed over as having limited purchase in twentieth century literary history.⁶ Yeats’s dance plays create spectators who implicitly contribute to the performance instead of being passively distant from it. While subsequent chapters will develop in detail how various dramatists engage with, transform, and refine Yeats’s dramaturgy, this chapter has a twofold focus: (a) examine how Yeats’s dramaturgy challenges preconceived notions of props and what is proper for/proprietary to the performance space and (b) how Yeats’s dance plays provide a way of rethinking the audience-actor relationship that challenges dominant modernist views of that relationship.⁷

⁵ See Michael McAteer’s *Yeats and European Drama* (Cambridge UP, 2010), Katherine Worth’s *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (Athlone, 1978), as well as the numerous references to Symbolist drama (particularly that of Maeterlinck) in Yeats’s own letters and essays. While one could read Eliot’s interest in Yeats’s dramatic experiments through the lens of their shared interest in Symbolism and other Continental aesthetic movements or through the lens of how these literary movements affected their own later dramaturgies, doing so ignores the long-term effect Yeats had on Eliot and other dramatists.

⁶ The novelty of Yeats’s drama can be seen when compared to what was popular in London and the rest of Britain in the 1910s: the problem plays of Shaw, Ibsen, and Hauptmann, the biting social comedies of St. John Hankin, the genteel bourgeois comedies of J.M. Barrie and Arthur Pinero, the realist, highly topical, northern-focused plays of the Manchester School, the clever verse comedies of Granville Barker and Clifford Bax, and the highly popular dramas of John Galsworthy, which center on social issues and the English class system.

⁷ As my introduction states, I take the dominant views of this relationship to be those of Artaud (cruelty), Brecht (alienation), Shaw (didacticism), amongst others. See my introduction for more detailed readings of how these views differ from the views of the dramatists discussed in this study.

My focus on props builds upon Kendall Walton's investigation into how a prop "mandates imaginings" (1990: 69) from readers and spectators. Walton, however, focuses on how prop-oriented make-believe functions to create fictional truths that constitute fictional worlds, whereas I focus on what is *proprietary* and *proper* to the stage.⁸ My focus remains keenly aware that the word *prop*, at least in the theatre, is but a shortened form of *stage property*. Any usage of the word "property" denotes a socially systematized pattern of belonging, means of ownership and transmission, and an entire set of norms regarding appropriate usage, fitness of use, and its singular, particular character within a larger social framework.⁹ The following section examines how the musicians in *At the Hawk's Well* become, by their function, something proprietary to the stage and how this proprietary-ness affects or could possibly affect audience members. In terms of property, they function as *a part* of the performance space while nonetheless remaining, as moving bodies, *apart* from it. As the following few pages demonstrate, this prop-driven oscillation between centrality and marginality creates invigorating ways for the spectator to engage with the drama.

The second portion of this chapter examines how this invigorating engagement suspends spectators' ability to be passive voyeurs and instead casts them as participants in the drama. This section examines how Yeats presents the spectator with "two worlds – two

⁸ See 38ff of *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. I do find Walton's focus on how prop-oriented make-believe differs when it comes to (a) depictive representations like sculpture, painting, and music and (b) verbal representations like novels, poems, and spoken words in the theatre useful because it allows one to see how props function doubly/differently in the theatre, allowing one to see how its scenery, costumes, and music (depictive) and verbal aspects operate to elicit different sorts of imaginings from audience members. See Part Three, Modes and Manners (293-384) of *Mimesis as Make-Believe* for a more exhaustive account of these representative modes. Walton focuses primarily on the ontology of fictional objects as well as, to a lesser degree, their affective power over spectators and readers.

⁹ I am drawing from the shared Latin root of property, proper, and propriety: the first being *proprietas*; the second, *proprium*; the third, *proprietas*. The notion of ownership and transmission of property, while interesting in relation to the theatre history and portable props, has less purchase for this study than a focus on belonging, usage, and the singular character thereof.

heterogeneous logics – on the same stage, in the same world” (Rancière 2009, 11). In particular, it focuses on how Yeats’s idea of intimacy and the import he grants to ritual affords spectators the opportunity to develop different ways of dramatic seeing and feeling. By doing so, Yeats’s dramaturgy creates and trains a new sort of audience member, one who is capable of serving as a collaborator. Absent Yeats’s clever demands upon spectators, an interwar and postwar theatre of collaborative and intervening audiences who “talk back” would have never found its voice. In short, this chapter takes Eliot’s claim that “Yeats had nothing, and we have had Yeats” as a starting point; what the following chapters will illustrate is the *something* that came from this “nothing” and how it directly shaped both interwar dramatic production and the development of postwar drama.

I. A Prop(er) Staging?

I had to go away in the middle, which was wretched, as I was getting quite worked up and impressed. It’s the beginning of an attempt to give poetic plays in such an inexpressive way that they can be done for quite small audiences....I find I can manage quite well without any scenery at all—but they had been a little too careful not to disturb the room, and I couldn’t help being disconcerted, just when I’d persuaded myself that I had before me a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland, to notice the characters skirting around a Louis XV table covered with French novels.

—Edward Marsh

While Eliot’s comments provide a literary historical framework for understanding the influence that this production possessed, Edward Marsh’s comments provide a more immediate impression of the first performance of *At the Hawk’s Well*. Marsh, an influential polymath, civil servant, and patron of Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke, also attended the April 2nd performance. His response to the performance captures the tension between the everyday

surroundings of the drawing room and the strangely ritualistic dramatic action occurring before him:

I can manage quite well without any scenery at all – but they had been a little too careful not to disturb the room, and I couldn't help being disconcerted, just when I'd persuaded myself that I had before me a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland, to notice the characters skirting around a Louis XV table covered with French novels (383).

What Marsh's response illustrates is less the nature of salon drama – after all, Edmund Dulac and Yeats, in their respective stage design and directorial decisions, could have easily removed, cordoned off, or otherwise made obscure the room's everyday objects – and more the effect that Yeats's dance plays hoped to achieve. What proved difficult for Marsh, and perhaps others in the drawing room, was not the formal demands placed upon the audience; Marsh's comments illustrate that he was able to persuade himself that “before [him was] a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland” despite their being no scenery to represent the setting. What “disconcerted” Marsh was the anachronistic table and novels that deflated his being “worked up and impressed” by the performance. The stark presence of what was not proper to the diegetic framework, after already having done the imaginative labor to create the “wild mountain tract,” was what “disconcerted” Marsh.

Marsh's choice of “disconcerted” remains worthy of further consideration. Disconcertion implies less one being simply confused or annoyed and more that one's deep-seated sense of harmony or complacent self-possession have been transgressed in some fashion. The ideas one possesses about the way that things in general are to fit together and work in relation to one

another have been loosed from their moorings; furthermore, my ability to be complacent about what constitutes me as a human subject has been unseated to no small degree.¹⁰ What is also telling is how Marsh brackets this disconcertion with statements about the visual and visualization: he is able to do “without any scenery at all” (scenery being what is seen), his recognizing how the production did not “disturb the room” (his taking exception to the audience’s lines of sight), his being able to imagine himself being in “a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland,” only to then “notice” the table and modern novels. The disconcertion Marsh experiences is predicated on the visual not matching his expectation, on there being a tension between *what* is performed and *where* it is performed. The questions that Marsh’s comments seem to be driving towards are twofold: what is proper to the performance space *and* what counts as a stage property/prop?¹¹ The former question concerns itself with audience expectation and how a performance accords with, frustrates, or refashions said expectation; the latter concerns itself with how the performance presents itself to a given audience as well as the valence and function it gives to everyday objects. This section will examine the latter question, with the following section investigating the former question and how it relates to the audience-actor relationship. At the heart of both of these questions is the unresolvable tension between audience disconcertion and their being “worked up and impressed” by the production, a tension I see as being rooted in the performance’s inventive usage of props and the manner that the audience engages with the performance space; the following pages will argue that this

¹⁰ At first glance, this seems similar to Brecht’s aim to get one to *think* in the theatre, to become a more careful observer; Yeats differs from Brecht, however, in that Yeats hopes to bring audience members into a ritual-like community whereas Brecht seeks to “divide” audiences. The closing pages of the penultimate section of this chapter briefly discuss the differences and similarities between Brecht and Yeats’s dramaturgy.

¹¹ Marsh’s comments also prompt one to consider the tension between what is *visible* and what is *visualized* by the spectator. The second section of this chapter addresses this rather productive tension, seeing it as part of Yeats’s attempt to rethink spectatorship by creating different registers of dramatic seeing and feeling.

tension is what Yeats wants to explore in dance plays like *At the Hawk's Well*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, and *Calvary*.

Perhaps one of the reasons that subsequent performances of Yeats's dance plays often come off poorly might be because they lack the novel interplay between prop and actor found in the premiere. The reason that these plays are rarely produced and even more rarely done so with any modicum of success is not just that Yeats wanted something that no existing theatre could have provided. Nor is it that the dance plays come off as "more pretentious than theatrically meaningful," where "the moments of absolute engagement that Yeats demands...simply never arrive," or that all productions "underline Yeats's limitations as a dramatist" and leave audiences "returning [Yeats's] theatre to the shelf."¹² One would have a hard time imagining the profound disconcertion Marsh felt in a production where "the tables had been moved back or at least cleared of French novels" (Caldwell 49), as was the case with the war charity performance at Lady Islington's salon on April 4, 1916.¹³ The manner that the actors interact with the props upon or near the stage communicates clearly Yeats's anti-theatrical challenge to the stodgy, safe conservatism of the commercial, realist theatre.¹⁴ Absent

¹² "Drama diffused by distracting images: Yeats festival opens at the Peacock" by David Nowlan, *The Irish Times* 9 August 1990; "It's a long way from *Cathleen* to *Purgatory*: SECOND OPINION" by Fintan O'Toole, *The Irish Times* 18 August 1990; "In the Theatres," *The Irish Times* 28 June 1984; "Reviews: The Cuchulain Cycle" by Peter Crawley, *The Irish Times* 30 November 2006. Even avant-garde groups like the Living Theatre, who rarely shied away from verse dramas, found that "we don't know how to do them right...nor do we know how to make glow the formal structures and theatrical devices of the theatre verse...a theatre not of the realist style" and lamented that all the "prevalent theatre...knew only that Yeats wasn't good box office" (Beck 11).

¹³ Yeats, when speaking of this production, viewed it with "slight disdain" (Foster II, 39) and found it less rewarding than the premiere – stating that "a charity audience is a bad one" (*Letters* 611); see also *Plays and Controversies* (1923): 415-419 or *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921): 85-88, both of which reproduce "A Note on the First Performance of *At the Hawk's Well*." In this short essay, Yeats laments that the war charity production was one where "my muses were but half welcome" (88).

¹⁴ By anti-theatrical, I am largely relying on Puchner's usage of the term to refer to a form of theatre "at odds with the value of theatricality" (2002: 7) which relies on star actors, expensive stage production, overly greedy producers, and

these “proper” interactions, all one has is a strange drama that more times than not fails to be “theatrically meaningful.”¹⁵

The way, then, that props act in Yeats’s dance plays is to make the production more meaningful and powerful. For Yeats, they do so not merely by “mandate[ing] imaginings” but mandating certain *sorts* of “imaginings” by blurring the line between the agential and the static (Walton 1990, 69). A prop is an object that must be “‘triggered’ by an actor” and thus “put into play [by actors]....to ‘animate’ the plot” (Sofer 2003: 11, 20)¹⁶ as well as that which, as Kendall Walton argues “mandates imaginings” (1990: 69).¹⁷ Actors engage with props, as Sofer argues, in order to flesh out and move forward the dramatic action. This is clearly true with *At the Hawk’s Well*, where the sole prop is “a square blue cloth [meant] to represent a well” (CP 137) that the Old Man, Cuchulain, and Guardian of the Well gather around.¹⁸ It is around this square/well that the three characters gather, move about, and focus their attention. But what about everyday objects, such as the Louis XV table covered with novels around which the characters skirt, that act as if they were props? In what ways do these “animate” the play’s plot?

passive, largely bourgeois audience. Puchner sees this as a “resistance to the theatre” (19) whereas I see it as the genesis of a new sort of theatre and performance space.

¹⁵ Only *At the Hawk’s Well* was ever performed as Yeats intended prior to the publication of *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921). The music and dancing of Geoge Anthiel and Ninette de Valois in *Fighting the Waves* (the prose version of *Emer*) at the Abbey in August 1929 as well as Ninette de Valois’ December 1931 production of *The Dreaming of the Bones* did please Yeats. Joseph Holloway’s reaction to the former production perhaps illustrates the general opinion with his statement of “Oh, what noise!” and his recollection of people beginning “to leave shortly after the ballet started” (50). For more information regarding the Anthiel-de Valois productions, see Sylvia Ellis’s *The Plays of W.B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (1995).

¹⁶ Sofer, however, arguing against theatre semiotics, firmly states that props must be inanimate (11ff), a point which I find unable to quite account for Maeterlinckian marionette drama or the effects said drama had on Yeats. Yeats, instead of firmly demarcating what is stage property and what is actor seems to be blurring the boundaries between each in plays like *At the Hawk’s Well* and *The Dreaming of the Bones*. See McAuley’s *Space in Performance* and Bosonnet’s *Function of Stage Properties* for further discussions of how stage property (as opposed to objects) are defined.

¹⁷ In *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Walton defines principles of generation as “rules about what is to be imagined in what circumstances” (40). Props, then, “are generators of fictional truths, things which, by virtue of their nature or existence, make propositions fictional” (37).

¹⁸ I shall refer to *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (Macmillan, 1963) as CP followed by the corresponding page number.

Can one say that skirting by an object is the same as triggering it? While one could argue that these objects are not part of the performance space but merely form the boundary of it, such arguments do not account for the profound disconcertion caused by these objects and the manner that they affected audience members.¹⁹ In cases such as the premiere of *At the Hawk's Well*, they animate the plot for audience members by interrupting their imaginative efforts to persuade themselves that "before [them was] a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland" (Marsh 383). If we view animating a plot as giving the plot impulse, spirit, direction, and imparting an active quality to it, then these everyday objects, despite their anachronism, definitely do that. They prevent audience members from over-identifying with the production, from being, as Yeats says in "The Theatre" (1900), overly "content with the sympathy of our nerves" (*EE* 124). Instead, Yeats advocates that audience members pay heed to "the music of words [which] is exhausting, like all intellectual emotions" even though "few people like exhausting emotions" (124). Yeats later asserts in "The Tragic Theatre" (1910) that

passionate art...moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance....We [in the audience] feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. That which is before our eyes perpetually vanishes and returns again in the midst of the excitement it creates, and the more enthralling it is, the more do we forget it (*EE* 179).

¹⁹ Aside from Marsh, Eliot and Pound were so moved by the performance as to completely re-evaluate Yeats's works. Yeats was adamant that there be no substantive division between the performers and spectators; instead, he advocated the performers being always "within arm's reach of their audience" (*Variorum* 1305).

I view the fact that audience members had to oscillate their attention from the drawing room, which the production crew was “careful not to disturb” from its everyday state, and the imagined scene of “a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland” as being the sort of “reverie” engendered by “passionate art” where the scene “before our eyes perpetually vanishes and returns again in the midst of the excitement it creates.” In this respect, the novel-covered table acts as a prop because it both animates the dramatic action in the way Yeats desired,²⁰ as “The Theatre” and “The Tragic Theatre” illustrate, as well as mandates imaginative engagement with the dramatic action.²¹

This utilization of everyday objects is not the only manner that Yeats’s dance plays rethink what is proper/proprietary to the stage. The prior few pages discussed a somewhat standard sort of props, everyday objects that become sites of meaning because of their proximity to or inclusion in the performance space. Building on this discussion of standard props and how they animated both the plot as well as engendered a certain sort of audience response, the subsequent pages will focus on what I term *agential props*.²² By agential props, I mean actors, such as the three musicians, who are not chorus members and do not participate in the dramatic action but occupy a liminal space between an actor portraying a character and an

²⁰ While this animation can also be seen as a distraction from the events being performed, the following section demonstrates the need for active interpretation and the spectator’s ability to remake the performance in front of her.

²¹ This relationship between the everyday and the strange was on its way to becoming a staple in Continental aesthetics. Yeats’s comments on Nō drama and his staging for *At the Hawk’s Well* anticipate Shklovsky’s “Art as Device” by one and two years, respectively. Oftentimes, Yeats’s dance plays in particular and poetic dramas in general are seen as historical anomalies; my study, by historicizing them via the philosophical archive, illustrates the limitations of such a viewpoint. It is no small stretch, then, to link Yeats (via Shklovsky’s *ostranenie*) to Brecht’s notion of *verfremdungseffekt*, which also focuses on estranging the audience from the players.

²² These “props” are *agential* because they perform a certain activity without entering into the dramatic action itself.

inert object.²³ To return to Kendall Walton's definition of props as that which "mandates imaginings" (1990: 69), I will examine in the following pages how the three musicians in *At the Hawk's Well* operate as agential props precisely because of the types of "imaginings" they require of audience members.

At first glance, dubbing a musician – a performing human being – as a prop, agential or not, seems counterintuitive. Walton's defining a prop as what makes one "aware of the implied game" or "remind one of a game of make-believe (1993: 51) remains flexible enough to allow me to dub the musicians, by virtue of their function alone, as props of a certain kind. They function, however, as something proprietary to the stage while nonetheless remaining, as bodies who move, decidedly apart from the staging. The dialectical tension created by the musicians' being a part of/being apart from the performance space is similar to that created by the novel-covered Louis XV table around which the dancers and actors skirted. The key difference, however, is the diegetic role that these musicians play. In addition to providing background music to the performance, the musicians also narrate the action for the spectators. This is a typical choral function and would make it seem that the musicians are nothing more than a chorus; however, unlike most choruses, they never serve as interlocutors with the main characters. At no time do they ever enter into the dramatic action. Instead, as Martin Puchner argues, the "musicians take over the function of setting the stage" (2002: 130), a vital role given the general lack of props and set design.²⁴ Instead of merely supplying the audience with information or commentary, the

²³ For explorations of what constitutes a chorus and how they function, see Budelmann, Easterling, Hawthorne, Henrichs, and Longo.

²⁴ While I find Puchner's readings of Yeats's dance plays valuable, I will not be focusing on how the "diegetic space [created by the musicians]...is projected right on top of the mimetic scene" and the overall "struggle between

words of the musicians push the audience members to “persuade” themselves that before them was “a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland” (Marsh 383). The musicians, surrounded by the everyday objects in Lady Cunard’s drawing-room, call the performative space into being:

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind
And I call to the mind’s eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place
The salt sea wind has swept bare. (CP 136)

As the musicians sing this song, they “*unfold [a] cloth*” with “*a gold pattern suggesting a hawk*” and then “*fold up the cloth again, pacing with a rhythmic movement of arms towards the First Musician*” (CP 136-37). This cloth serves the same purpose as a raised curtain that signals the beginning of the dramatic action while also allowing “the main characters [to take up]...their positions in the acting area while partly concealed [from the audience] by the spread cloth” (Miller 220). After this song of the unfolding and folding of the cloth, all three musicians will “*have taken their places against the wall beside their instruments of music; they will accompany the movements of the players with gong or drum or zither*” (CP 137). Until the final song, where they unfold and fold the cloth again to both allow the players to exit and to signal the end of the drama, they do not move from their places against the wall.

diegesis and mimesis” (130). The struggle between diegesis and mimesis is less germane to my study than the changing relation the audience has to the performance space itself.

The movements of the musicians as they fold and unfold the cloth “*suggest* [those of] a *marionette*” and thus work against possible affective connections that may have been engendered by the physical proximity between the spectators and the musicians (CP 138).²⁵ Their movements are clearly *not* human despite their clearly being human; to return to Sofer, they are moving as if they were “‘triggered’ by an actor” and are “not themselves animate” in the sense that human beings typically are (11, 20). Yeats, then, builds on the “the theatre of estrangement [that] Maeterlinck had developed in the 1890s” with his puppet dramas (McAteer 6).²⁶ Maeterlinck developed his puppet dramas because, as W.B. Worthen argues in *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theatre*, the marionette’s actions “seem not to interfere with the determinations of the authorial text... because they don’t *act*” (104). While Yeats seems to diverge from Maeterlinckian drama at this point, given that the musicians do, in fact, “*act*,” their actions are so prescribed that there is precious little chance of their interfering with the aims of the text.²⁷ Additionally, their marionette-like movement makes the musicians seem to

²⁵ All the characters in *At the Hawk’s Well* move in this manner; Yeats abandons this requirement in the stage directions of following plays, stating that the Woman of the Sidhe in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* seem “*more an idol than a human being*” (CP 191). Given the stage directions, though, in *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Calvary*, which references staging and movements “*as in the preceding plays*” (276, 288), one could argue that Yeats sees all his dance plays as keeping with the Maeterlinckian, marionette-style movement of *At the Hawk’s Well*. In regards to Yeats’s verse, one could see a relationship between their desired effect and the effect of chanting/chanting; cf. “Speaking to the Psalter” (1902).

²⁶ Maeterlinck’s puppet drama *The Interior* (was the first foreign production of the Abbey in March 1907; see IDM 206 for a list of foreign plays produced by the Abbey. Also, many of Yeats’s early and middle-period essays on drama, such as “Plans and Methods” from the May 1899 edition of *Beltaine*, view the plays of Maeterlinck, amongst others, as ideal for the “little and inexpensive theatres” that he wishes to model his dramatic projects upon (IDM 143). In “J.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time,” (1910) Yeats states that Maeterlinck “obtains time for reverie” by refusing to choose “persons who are as faint as breath upon a looking-glass” for characters, choosing instead “symbols who can speak a language slow and heavy with dreams because their own life is a but a dream” (EE 241).

²⁷ While one could argue that almost *all* actors’ actions are prescribed, provided a play-text is being used, Yeats envisioned his drama as being able to rectify the histrionic gestures and spectacle of commercial theatre. In 1903, Yeats stated that “to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon the stage” and called for “get[ting] rid of everything that is restless, everything that draws attention away from the sound of the voice” and that “There must be nothing unnecessary, nothing that will distract the attention from speech and [intense] movement” (IDM 27, 28); in 1906, he argued against “developing the player at the expense of

lack autonomous agency while also underscoring the role that fate and ceremonial, ritualistic repetition plays in the drama. While one could chalk this lack of agency up to reinforcing the importance that fated action plays in *At the Hawk's Well* and other dance plays, why would Yeats have mentioned marionettes? Marionettes are mentioned in order to convey not just the fated-ness of their movements but also the object-likeness of the musicians.

Since marionettes are dummy figures, tools of the puppet-master, they function as manipulable, portable stage property that can be fully controllable, movable, generally resemble humans, and – since they have visible strings – have no pretense of agency.²⁸ Granted, the musicians, having no strings to hold them in place, possess *some* agency; however, the herky-jerky rhythm of their movements and the fact that their movements, aside from speech and the playing of instruments, cease while the dramatic action occurs vastly overshadows what little agency they do possess. In addition to never entering into dramatic dialogue with the other characters, the musicians seemingly are controlled by something beyond themselves; their motives for acting or speaking are never given to the audience. They are not chorus members, who generally interact with the players, nor are they retrospectively telling a story from “*the Irish Heroic Age*” to an audience of contemporaries (CP 136). In short, they do not use the historical present tense to make actions of the past seem more vivid.²⁹ Furthermore, the

the poet” (102). Other essays such as “The Theatre,” “Speaking to the Psaltery,” “Certain Noble Plays of Japan,” and “The Tragic Theatre” discuss his advocacy of voice, oratory, and “recalling words to their ancient sovereignty” (EE 125). Unsurprisingly, given his interest in magic and enchantment, Yeats seemed quite taken with the relationship between theatre and incantation.

²⁸ See n2 and its mentioning of Gordon Craig’s notion of the über-marionette and the influence this had on Yeats’s dramaturgy in the 1900s and 1910s.

²⁹ Yeats’s other dance plays employ the present tense or variants thereof in a similar manner. Although the musicians in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919) and *Calvary* (1920) speak only during the opening and closing songs that accompany the unfolding and folding of the cloth, these songs utilize the present tense. As in *At the Hawk's Well*, the musicians in *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919) have a much more robust role than the two dance plays that followed it.

musicians' costumes and makeup are similar to that of the characters who do take part in the dramatic action; were they to be seen as temporally different from the other characters, would not their costuming, not to mention their movements, reflect this difference? The musicians only use the present, present perfect, and present progressive tenses in their songs, signifying a shared temporality between them and the action. Even statements that aren't description, such as the second musician's statement "I am afraid of this place" (137) occur in a present tense. The musicians occupy the same space and time as the other characters yet never truly enter into the dramatic action nor do they serve a solely diegetic function. Each of the dance plays prompts a similar question – beyond their narrative function, who are these musicians and how do they function? They seem, even when not taking their place "against the wall" (137, 185, 276) or "at the back of the stage" (289), to be integral to the dramatic action yet markedly *not* a part of it. By having the three musicians function in this manner, Yeats attempts to prompt a whole host of questions regarding acting, dramatic action, and what is proprietary to the stage. In many respects, the dramas of Auden, Eliot, and others busy themselves with attempting to answer, in part or in whole, these same questions.³⁰

The Dreaming of the Bones tells the story of a "Young Man" who took part in the Easter Rising, who during his escape runs into a Stranger and a Young Woman who end up being the 700-year old ghosts of Diarmud and Dervorgilla, the infamous pair who "brought/ A foreign army from across the sea," whom ask for—and are refused—forgiveness by the young irregular (CP 282). The musicians in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, in addition to the opening and closing songs, also describe the three characters' movements around the stage as they walk "to the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe" (279). While the first set of descriptions occur in the simple past tense, the song that follows the descriptions remains wholly in the present tense; the set of descriptions, though, following the second stanza of the song, return to the present tense.

³⁰ In some respects, the musicians function as an amalgam of poet and audience, an amalgam that stresses how complementary these two roles are. This stressing of the complementarity of the spectator with another role is a hallmark of the dramas in this study. Auden and Isherwood later posit the spectator as troupe member, Eliot casts the spectator as juror, and Arden presses audience members to serve as judges. Each of these dramas investigate the effects of providing the spectator with a new role as well as ways in which the spectator, by virtue of her simply *being* a spectator, is always already cast in this role.

The musicians function as something proprietary to the stage, yet obviously remain performing, speaking bodies. What else, then, can they be but “props,” *per se*? The musicians *belong* to the stage, having no place in the dramatic action; the dramatic action, however, would make precious little sense were they absent. They remain “inanimate” in many respects while still possessing the ability to “‘animate’ the plot” (Sofer 20). They serve, then, not as human bodies who draw the focus of audience members, but as agential props who require a new sort of dramatic seeing and feeling from audience members. This new sort of dramatic seeing and feeling not only helps the audience make sense of the drama; *it gives the audience a new sense of how drama can be made*. The remaining dramas in this study – from Auden to Arden, from Eliot to Beckett – take up this challenge. Each of them, by reworking of the audience-actor relationship primarily through spatial means, provides a way of expanding what constitutes drama. This holds true regardless of whether one is speaking of the drama *cum* dinner party of Auden’s *Paid on Both Sides*, the transformation of the performance space into a courtroom in Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, the positioning of the audience in Eliot’s *Sweeney Agonistes*, the direct address of Arden’s *The Workhouse Donkey*, the tripartite stage of Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6*, or Beckett’s usage of props in *Happy Days*, *Krapp’s Last Tape*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Rockaby*. Almost all of the plays listed above concern themselves with creating a new means of dramatic seeing and feeling, and by virtue of that a new sort of audience member who has a different purchase on the world which surrounds her. What the following section discusses is Yeats’s own particular take on *why* and *how* this new means of dramatic seeing and feeling occurs.

II. The Intimacy of Close(d) Distance

The stage-opening, the powerful light and shade, the number of feet between myself and the players have destroyed intimacy. I have found myself thinking of players who needed perhaps but to unroll a mat in some Eastern garden. Nor have I felt this only when I listened to a speech, but even more when I have watched the movement of a player or heard singing in a play. I love all the arts that can still remind me of their origin among the common people, and my ears are only comfortable when the singer sings as if mere speech had taken fire, when he appears to have passed into song almost imperceptibly. I am bored and wretched, a limitation I greatly regret, when he seems no longer a human being but an invention of science.

–WB Yeats, “Certain Noble Plays of Japan” (1915)

....Ritual, the most powerful form of drama, differs from the ordinary form, because every one who hears it is also a player. Our modern theatre, with its seats growing more expensive, and its dramatic art drifting always from the living impulse of life, and becoming more and more what Rossetti would have called ‘soulless self-reflections of man’s skill’, no longer gives pleasure to any imaginative mind.

–*Samhain*: 1904 – The Dramatic Movement

In *At the Hawk’s Well* and other dance plays, Yeats rethinks the audience-actor relationship in ways that challenge the usual modernist views of that relationship.³¹ The primary means of this rethinking comes in his arguments about *why* intimacy matters and *how* it functions in audience-actor relationships. I will first discuss the *why* and *how* and then go on to briefly situate Yeats’s view of how the audience-actor relationship works in relation to other contemporaneous views of these relationships.

Yeats constantly laments that the commercial theatre of his day had indeed lost “the living impulse of life,” full of actors who seem to be “invention[s] of science” instead of being

³¹ I am speaking here of Yeats contemporaries—see n6—as well as those whose theories of audience are seen as quintessentially modernist, namely Brecht, Artaud, Shaw, Rolland, and Bryusov. The end of this chapter offers a brief gloss of their theories and how Yeats responds to them.

“active men” (EE 164).³² As the above quotation from “Certain Noble Plays of Japan” (1915) illustrates, Yeats saw the proscenium arch theatre, with its “stage-opening, *powerful* light and shade, [and] the number of feet between myself and the players have *destroyed* intimacy” (EE 164, emphases mine). I emphasize *powerful* and *destroyed* to show both the *cause* of intimacy’s loss as well as the irrevocability of that loss; intimacy is not compromised or manhandled, it is completely razed to the ground.³³ For Yeats, one cannot work within this sort of theatre to reclaim intimacy; the commercial, proscenium arch theatre has been rendered useless because of its powerfulness over and distance from the audience. The domain of intimacy, simply put, must be elsewhere.

Yeats’s stage directions and prompt copy notes indicate the extent to which he saw his dance plays as being the ideal tools for creating this new domain for intimacy. Yeats, in his opening stage directions, states: “...we found it better to play by the light of a large chandelier [rather than any special lighting]. *Indeed I think, so far as my present experience goes, that the most effective lighting is the lighting we are most accustomed to in our rooms*” (1921: 3). Instead of the “powerful light and shade” created by conventional lighting, we have the more muted, familiar lighting of “our rooms.” The very thing that makes the lighting “*effective*” is both its lack of ostentatious power and its everydayness. As was the case with the novel-covered Louis XV table, the familiar, simple, and unassuming helps to shape the manner that the audience engages with the

³² This is not to say that Yeats saw the commercial theatre as being the *sole* culprit behind this destruction of intimacy in the theatre. I am using his comments on the commercial, predominantly realist, theatre of his day because they state his claims regarding intimacy the most provocatively. Yeats, in essays such as “The Theatre,” (1900), *Samhain: 1902*, *Samhain: 1906* – “Literature and the Living Voice,” and *Samhain: 1908* – “First Principles” lament the English influence “born of Puritan conviction and shopkeeping timidity and insincerity” upon Irish letters as also having a similar detrimental effect (*IDM* 110).

³³ Yeats’s idea of the destructiveness of the commercial theatre is far from simple bitterness; many of Yeats’s contemporaries, even those as different from him as Shaw and St. John Hankin, derided how dramas overpowered audiences and thus rendered them passive.

production. The reason for this is that conventional lighting would compromise the emotive connection that Yeats hopes to forge between audience members and the production as well as shatter the delicate interplay between the everyday and the imagined scene of “semi-historic Ireland” around which the staging revolves. Yeats completely eschews lighting that overpowers the audience, which either allows them to sit in anonymity away from the performative space or commands their attention to be focused on a single group of players or piece of set design at the expense of all else.³⁴ This anonymity and passivity has no truck with intimacy as Yeats sees it.

Just as Shaw had decried “bardolatry” and how slavish, blind devotion to Shakespeare had stultified drama in the British Isles, Yeats seems to be decrying not simply theatricality but the overweening power it exerts over audience members and the affective states, methods of seeing, and imaginativity it prevents (1901: xiii). For Yeats, the intimacy that conventional theatre practices has laid waste can be regained only via a theatre that more closely resembles *living*, not as we theorize it, but as we actually *do* it. The modes of attention that the premiere of *At the Hawk’s Well* required from its audience was an oscillation between imaginative focus and an awareness of quotidian objects of which Marsh spoke. I argue that this mode of attention more closely resembled the manner that they experienced the world around them. The variety

³⁴ In many respects, one can read Yeats’s desire for a lit house, as odd as it seemed at the time and would seem even in the twenty-first century, as a *return* to pre-1870s standard theatre lighting practice. Prior to Richard Wagner’s turning off the auditorium lights at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus to focus spectators’ attention on the spectacle onstage, it was standard practice to leave the lights on. Wagner decided to turn off the house lights in order to stop the practices of talking during the performance, arriving late, and only coming to the theatre to be seen by others and scoff at one’s social inferiors. As Mark Twain remarks after seeing *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1891: “All the lights were turned low, so low that the congregation sat in a deep and solemn gloom....I should think our own show people would have invented or imported that simple and impressive device for securing and solidifying the attention of an audience long ago; instead of which there continue to this day to open a performance against a deadly competition in the form of noise, confusion, and a scattered interest.” Wagner, then, wanted the focus to be on the performance and not on the social interactions occurring in the house, as evidenced by Twain’s substituting “congregation” for audience; Wagner, much like Yeats at the Abbey and with his dance plays, was trying to train and create the sort of audience he wanted his productions to have.

of occurrences and objects that daily competed for their attention found little representation in the theatre of “powerful light and shade.” Equally, the attentiveness developed by modern daily life received precious little exercise in the conventional theatre: the audience sat in the dark and in a sense always remained there, their attentive and imaginative faculties required only to focus on a singular setting and group of actors.³⁵

Yeats’s efforts to reclaim intimacy, however, went beyond changing the lighting utilized. The remainder of his opening stage directions to *At the Hawk’s Well* as well as prompt copy notes shows how important closing the distance between players and spectators was to Yeats’s dramaturgy.³⁶ The original stage directions continue on from their comments on lighting to state that “*there is [to be] no mechanical means of separating them from us* (1921: 3). Furthermore, this desire to increase the proximity between actors and audience members corresponds to Yeats’s complaint in “Certain Noble Plays of Japan” about how “the number of feet between myself and the players” contributed to the destruction of intimacy in the commercial theatre (*EE* 164).³⁷ In his notes, Yeats spoke of his desire to have the performers always be “within arm’s reach of their audience” (*Variorum* 1305). As a result, there are no “*mechanical means of separating [the actors] from us.*” To further this close proximity between actors and audience, the number of invited guests was kept to but a few dozen so as to foreclose the “need of a mob or press” to

³⁵ Perhaps the reason that the majority of Yeats’s dance plays, including *Fighting the Waves* (the prose version of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* that was written for the dancer Ninette de Valois) proved so difficult to transition to a more public venue was that the plays *required* a certain sort of attention that the public stage, regardless of whether the audience was in close proximity to the players or separated from them via a platform stage, was incapable of eliciting from an audience.

³⁶ For early drafts and Yeats’s own annotations, see both the *Variorum* edition of his plays and *At the Hawk’s Well and The Cat and the Moon: Manuscript Materials* (Cornell UP, 2010)

³⁷ I do not wish to create the impression that the dance plays merely put into practice the ideas that Yeats theorized in “Certain Noble Plays of Japan” (1915); instead, I would argue that Yeats’s interest in this sort of drama, a drama that sought to elicit the sort of audience response and establish the sort of mood that the dance plays did was in the works can be seen in essays from *Samhain* forward.

survive (*EE* 163).³⁸ In keeping with this close proximity to the actors, both the Old Man and the Young Man (Cuchulain) enter “through the audience” (*CP* 138, 139).

Yeats also lamented the large “stage opening” of proscenium arch theatres, which signaled the following: the performance space/stage is definitively marked as a space apart from the audience space; the “picture frame” aspect of the proscenium lending itself to a certain sort of realism; the audience, being solely on one side, has but one vantage point; actors’ movements had to accommodate the audience’s limited vantage point; the creation of a vertical level of distance (via the apron’s raising the stage above spectators) as well as a horizontal distance from the audience. This sort of passive engagement with drama was seen by Yeats as “spoil[ing] an audience for good work” (*IDM* 44). In the same manner that conventional lighting did much to leave audiences in the dark, so to speak, requiring their attention and imagination to fix only onto one single spot, the conventional stage opening and seating patterns kept the audience in their place, so to speak.

Yeats, in his desire to create a drama that “differs from the ordinary form,” advocates something akin to a sort of ritual where “everyone who hears it is also a player” (*IDM* 43).³⁹

Yeats advocates a certain sort of shared experience felt by all involved in the drama, whether

³⁸ Foster is correct in stating that the audience was something of a “*cognoscenti*” (40) and that there is an inherent snobbery or elitism in some of Yeats’s dance play dramaturgy. While I do not deny this, I find that focusing overmuch on this sole aspect of Yeats’s dramaturgy clouds the literary historical import of what he was attempting. I intend to bypass without denying claims such as Foster’s in order to shift the scope of the discussion towards what Yeats’s dance plays accomplished or attempted to accomplish and how his dramaturgy informed interwar and postwar dramatic productions.

³⁹ It must be remembered, however, that Yeats is *not* being egalitarian here; the dance plays remained for Yeats an “aristocratic form” that had “no need of mob or press [in order] to pay its way” (*EE* 163). I think it is important, nonetheless, to not overstate Yeats’s snobbishness; he advocates an aristocratic *form* not an art form *solely for aristocracy*. For Yeats, the “aristocratic” also served as a bulwark against commercialism. The goal is a dramatic form that can both operate independently from the commercial theatre and can be avant-garde without worrying about the needs to kowtow too much to popular taste.

they be spectators or players. The question, though, remains as to what sort of ritual Yeats speaks of: is it a “fixed frequency of behavior” (Schechner 163), an effort “to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities” (Bell 1992: 74), merely a “matter of shows, representations, dramatic performances, imaginative actualizations of a vicarious nature” (Huizinga 1971: 15), the “*performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*” (Rappaport 1999: 24), or something else entirely?⁴⁰ In order to determine precisely what Yeats means by ritual or what sort of ritual he envisions, we must attend to the end of this ritual: “everyone who hears it is also a player.” This is more than just an attempt at inclusive drama: in the dance plays, the audience becomes a player in the literal etymological sense – player being rooted in *plegestre*, the Old English word for an athlete or wrestler.

This likening of spectators to athletes or wrestlers necessitates further thought. Athletes and wrestlers, while able to win a match or competition, never fully experience total mastery but instead must respond to the ongoing challenge of participation. Athletes always remain open to challenge, contestation, and the demand to defend their standing, title, or place. In the same manner that athletes cannot achieve total mastery, spectators cannot solely privilege one manner of seeing and engaging with the drama. Furthermore, to master a process almost always allows for and encourages one to cease to engage substantively with that process. Mastery, while not predicated entirely on passivity, allows for a cessation of engagement akin to passivity. Just as anonymity and passivity have no truck with intimacy as Yeats defines it,

⁴⁰ The number of definitions regarding ritual and the process of ritualization are myriad; Catherine M. Bell’s *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford UP, 1992) provides a general overview of many of these theories. Additionally, both Richard Schechner and Victor Turner’s numerous works on ritual and performance are worth consideration.

neither does mastery. Mastery has the potential to dissipate the tension so vital to Yeats's dramaturgy.

The audience must wrestle with the dramatic performance, must imagine itself, as did Marsh, as being in "a wild mountain tract of semi-historic Ireland" despite the performance being bordered by a "Louis XV table covered with French novels" with the entire production being only lit by "*the light of a large chandelier*" (Marsh 383, Yeats 3). Yeats wants a drama that is more inclusive *and* participatory as opposed to "imaginative actualizations of a vicarious nature." Furthermore, Yeats's unique usage of props and his rethinking of what is proprietary to the performance space equalizes the relationship between ritualized actions and "other, usually more quotidian, actions." While the dance plays, given that they do work from a script, a score, and step sheets, do impose a "fixed frequency of behavior" upon the players, this definition alone does not explain adequately how the audience engages with the production. Rappaport's focus on what is "*not entirely encoded by the performers,*" however, allows for the sort of imaginative and affective effort by the audience that Yeats implies⁴¹ when he wishes for a ritualistic drama where "everyone who hears it is also a player," where everyone has a vital role to play.⁴² Rappaport's focus on how performers do not fully encode a ritual performance with

⁴¹ Rappaport's definition hinges upon what *cannot* be encoded, what remains are the things said and done by performers. His assertion that "the performers of rituals do not specify all the acts and utterances constituting their own performances" (32) allows for a consideration of environment, preconceptions by the audience about what constitutes an appropriate/successful performance, etc. As a result, it also allows for a consideration of both expectations of a given performance as well as what can "disconcert" such performances. Given Yeats's interest in hearing "the murmuring of a new ritual" (EE 93), such a potential for disconcertion would go hand-in-hand with his notion of ritual.

⁴² Earlier, in "William Blake and His Illustrations to *The Divine Comedy*" (1897), Yeats likens ritual and the opening up of space for new rituals, to spiritual exhaustion and aesthetic effort:

...when man's desire to rest from spiritual labour, and his thirst to fill his art with mere sensation and memory, seem upon the point of triumph, some miracle transforms them to a new inspiration; and here and there among the pictures born of sensation and memory is the murmuring of a new ritual, the glimmering of new talismans and symbols (EE 93).

meaning thus allows for a more open sort of ritual, one that allows contributions from participants.

It seems at first glance that Yeats likens ritual participation in the drama to eliminating “the stage opening, the powerful light and shade, [and] the number of feet between myself and the players,” replacing them with familiar lighting and a close proximity to the dramatic action. Likewise, it seems that the transformation of the drama into something more ritualistic forecloses the sort of passive spectatorship that Yeats blames for “destroy[ing] intimacy” in the theatre. This, however, is but partly true. What audience members are made a part of and moved closely in front of is a drama of intense strangeness, full of marionette-like movement, droning song and music, played by characters who are either “wearing a mask” or have “*their faces made up to resemble masks*” (CP 136). Just as the spatial distance between player and spectator has been closed, audience members feel other types of unbridgeable distances between themselves and the actor all the more closely. Distance is both closed and made to seem closer, more enhanced.

Just as the musicians/agential props required different ways of dramatic seeing and feeling from audience members, the manner that the audience engages with the actors also requires such new sorts of dramatic seeing and feeling. Although the actors enter through the audience and are always but a few feet away from them, the proximity serves to make the strange even stranger: “*These masked players seem stranger when there is no mechanical means of separating them from us*” (CP 136). The affective power of identification, the ability to recognize

His invocation of ritual in the 1904 edition of *Samhain* focuses less on the relationship between ritual and the spiritual and more upon the relationship between ritual and community, particularly linguistic and aesthetic community. This is not to say that writings on ritual after his Blake essay foreclose upon the spiritual; the presence and power of the spirit world in his dance plays would disallow such arguments.

the player as someone like you and with whom you can empathize, that oftentimes seems so central to drama is complicated even though there is nothing “*separating them from us.*” Yeats emphasizes both identification and difference; *both* have to be experienced at close range instead of experiencing imaginative identification *through* physical distance. As “The Theatre” (1900) illustrates, Yeats is less interested in identification than he is in creating a theatre that is “remote, spiritual, and ideal” because such a theatre can restore “intellectual emotions...[which are] exhausting emotions” (EE 123, 124). The term “intellectual emotions” seems oxymoronic at first glance, but Yeats’s essay “Magic” (1901) suggests that such emotions may be nothing short of an undoing of what has “made our souls less sensitive....[which] were once naked to the winds of heaven [but] are now thickly clad” (EE 34). These emotions are, at their most basic, the intellect and emotions working together towards an end that neither can attain alone. Yeats wants to shatter the sort of emotive connections and barriers that lend themselves to audience passivity and therefore “spoils an audience for good work” (IDM 44). In their place he wants the sort of connection that inspires “exhausting emotions.”⁴³

Since dramatic seeing and feeling not only help the audience make sense of the drama but gives the audience a new sense of how drama can be made collectively, intellectual and exhausting emotions might also provide an audience member a newfound awareness of her relation to the drama. The discussion of “intellectual emotions” in “The Theatre” also seems similar to the ideas regarding the anti-self found in later writings such as *Per Amica Silentia*

⁴³ In some respects, one can view this argument against audience passivity through Yeats’s desire to build, as he said in “A Defence of the Abbey Theatre” (1926), a “national audience,” which he said was harder to do than train “a company of actors...[because] you cannot have a national theatre, and that *cannot be done by the theatre alone*, for it needs the *help* of schools and newspapers, and of all teachers of the people” (206, emphases mine). Yeats sees the training of an audience as being something that goes beyond the purview of the directors and actors alone.

Lunae (1917) and *A Vision* (1925).⁴⁴ Yeats describes the anti-self in “Ego Dominus Tuus,” the opening of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917)⁴⁵:

..the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self,
And, standing by these characters, disclose
All that I seek; (MY 324).⁴⁶

I am not saying that Yeats’s dance plays aim to push audience members towards an anti-self or that the actors are to be seen as audience members’ anti-selves. I argue instead that the modes of attentiveness Yeats encourages—the idea that the quotidian and the ritualistically strange must be equally attended to and oscillated between, the idea that one cannot focus on one thing alone to the exclusion of all else—bear no small similarity to his later belief that certain opposing ideas “are equal and fight for mastery” (AV 19).⁴⁷ This fight for mastery is similar to *plegestre* (players) who wrestle with and compete for transitory, as opposed to final, glory. As *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* states: “a mind that grasps objects simultaneously according to the degree of its liberation does not think the same thought with the mind that sees objects one after another” (MY 362).

⁴⁴ While one could argue that the anti-self is in some ways non-intellectual, an attempt to get *beyond* the intellect and into the realm of the general memory and unconsciousness, I would argue that the very notion of an anti-self is predicated on intellectual effort. While its aim might be to get beyond one’s intellectual boundaries, such transcendence results precisely *from* intellectual effort.

⁴⁵ Yeats composed “Ego Dominus Tuus” in December 1915; it hence predates his writing of *At the Hawk’s Well* and his other dance plays (1916 onwards).

⁴⁶ I will refer to *Mythologies* (Macmillan, 1959) as MY, followed by the corresponding page number.

⁴⁷ I will refer to *The Collected Works of WB Yeats, Volume XIII: A Vision, the Original 1925 Version* (Scribner, 2008) as AV followed by the corresponding page number.

This is so because, as Yeats argues, “anything separated from its opposite—and victory is separation—‘consumes itself away.’ The existence of the one depends upon the existence of the other” (AV 108). The existence of the starkly, oppositionally different always remains a prerequisite for Yeats; without it, his aesthetics fall apart.⁴⁸

I reference these later, markedly more esoteric, writings to get at my earlier question of what exactly constitutes an intellectual emotion and what makes it exhausting. Intellectual emotions are refining emotions and it is this process of refinement that exhausts their possessor.⁴⁹ By refined, I mean something reworked in order to bring out its subtlety and precision, freed from extraneous elements; by process of refinement, I mean the willingness to attempt to consider affectively and intellectually different subject positions. In short, intellectual emotions are those that have attempted to engage “my anti-self,” even though he is “most unlike” all other “imaginable things.” The outcome of such an engagement might be a disclosure of “All that I seek.” It is telling, though, that Yeats does not speak of the ease of such a pursuit as requiring little effort but as being one of “sedentary toil/And by imitation of the great masters” (MY 323). Furthermore, such an engagement requires a different sort of attentiveness, since the anti-self doesn’t unabashedly declaim his “disclos[ure of] All that I seek” but instead

⁴⁸ Yeats states that his “system constantly compels us to consider beauty an accompaniment of war, and wisdom of decay” and that whatever truths come about have as their condition “that neither world separate from the other and become ‘abstract’” (AV 113, 114). His aesthetics and his goal of aesthetics (the pursuit of truths) *require* mutually informing oppositionality just as much as they require a refusal of abstraction. By abstraction, I mean the fact that in a conventional theatre, the audience is *abstracted* via distance and other factors from the performance.

⁴⁹ Although refinement is often, and justifiably, considered outmoded and unnecessarily exclusivist, my usage of the word stems from its metallurgical sense: a process of extraction and isolation undertaken in order to obtain a more usable or valuable/rarer material. It is telling that the final refined product is usually chemically identical to its original, non-refined state. What I am positing, then, is not simply a making *better* of these emotions but rendering them more flexible and usable, something that can be put to work in myriad ways.

....whisper[s] it as though

He were afraid the birds, who cry aloud

Their momentary cries before it is dawn,

Would carry it away to blasphemous men (MY 324).

What makes these intellectual emotions truly exhausting is not their just the “sedentary toil” associated with their pursuit, but the sort of straining, attenuated hearing required to hear the “whisper”⁵⁰ as well as the vigilance required to safeguard it so as to prevent it from being perverted by “blasphemous men.”⁵¹

I have intimated previously that the aim of much of Yeats’s experimentation with dance plays grows out of his desire to trigger new sorts of dramatic seeing and feeling; his espousal of intellectual, exhausting emotions, then, must be seen as the biggest part and heaviest parcel of this endeavor. Additionally, these intellectual emotions, while *exhausting*, remain far from *exhaustive*. They suffer no pretense of mastery but allow for incoherent alterity and understand the limitations of identification and understanding.

Yeats, in his desire for an intimate theatre, also draws attention to what intimacy entails. Intimacy is clearly *not* a matter of collapsing distance: the masks, costuming, strange movements, and strange diction of the players despite this closeness disproves the easy equation of proximity equaling intimacy. Instead, Yeats draws attention to the relationship

⁵⁰ If this seems to distant from “The Theatre” (1900), one need only remember this essay’s focus on our inability to *hear* poetry properly and actors’ “forg[etting] of the noble art of oratory, and [their giving] all their thought to the poor art of acting” (EE 124). Yeats goes on to state that theatre will become great again once we begin “recalling words to their ancient sovereignty” (125).

⁵¹ The text itself only makes mention of the anti-self safeguarding his/her message as he/she discloses it. I argue that the self, given the value of the message (it being “All that I seek”) and the method of delivery (a fearful, careful “whisper”) would also be charged implicitly with caring for whatever fragile truth the anti-self imparts.

between new ways of dramatic seeing and feeling.⁵² This new dramatic seeing and feeling requires a more precise awareness of intimacy. Oftentimes, intimacy is mistakenly conflated with proximity and closeness. Yeats draws attention to how intimacy remains predicated on an understanding of *optimal* distance and difference. Yeats reminds one that *intimus* refers not to *sameness* but to a deep, profound *closeness*. Intimacy always remains aware of difference, distance, and the potential for something new or strange to enter into the relationship.

Yeats draws audience members' attention to the ever-present distance in closeness by juxtaposing the ritualistic strangeness of the drama with the absence of any spatial barriers between the players and the audience.⁵³ Yeats focuses on drama's ability to create community in the same manner that ritual does; just as rituals often incorporate those present in their proceedings, dramas like the dance plays make "everyone who hears it...[into] a player."⁵⁴ Those who can "hear" the drama are those who have "escape[d] the stupefying memory of the theatre of commerce" (*EE* 123).⁵⁵ Although Yeats's aim to "restore the theatre of Art" by "recalling words to their ancient sovereignty" (*EE* 125) is not as inclusive as one would perhaps

⁵² Lauren Berlant's writing on intimacy and love proves useful, particularly her "Love, a Queer Feeling" (2001). Berlant considers of thinking about love, and, by proxy, intimacy, "as an index of duration...as a kind of tattoo, a rhythm, a shape, timing. An environment of touch or sound that you make so that there is something to which you turn and return...these qualities of love can tell us something more general...about intimacy" (439). See also Berlant's monograph *Cruel Optimism* (2011) and her edited collection of essays, *Intimacy* (2000).

⁵³ See Natalie Crohn Schmitt's "'Separating Strangeness' and 'Intimacy' in W. B. Yeats's Drama" *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 2001).

⁵⁴ The dominant belief in the 1900s and 1910s was that the theatre began in ritual and developed out of community-wide ritual performances into theatre. The work of the classical scholars like AB Cook, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Gilbert Murray (who was a friend of Yeats) pioneered this trend.

⁵⁵ I mention this to illustrate the exclusivity of ritual – while rituals are inclusive in many respects, they are also exclusive in that they incorporate only certain groups or types of people, occur only at certain times, etc. Additionally, rituals require some modicum of orthodoxy; what is heterodox, then, is by nature excluded.

hope, focusing solely on the exclusivity of ritual and community prevents one from seeing the unicity of Yeats's view of audience.⁵⁶

Yeats sees audience members as being potential collaborators as opposed to passive spectators. Yeats's *At the Hawk's Well* seems to call for a spectator who "participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way....[spectators who] are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them."⁵⁷ The new manners of dramatic seeing and feeling that the dance plays, when staged properly, hope to elicit remain predicated upon this sort of active interpretation. The oscillating attentiveness I spoke about in the prior section and the feelings of closeness and distance referenced in this section require active interpretation. Active interpretation does indeed "challenge the opposition between viewing and acting" because the viewer "participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way" (Rancière 2011: 13).⁵⁸ Furthermore, active interpretation resembles the sort of "Active virtue" that Yeats lauds in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, a virtue that Yeats contrasts with "the passive acceptance of a code"(cite). Absent this refashioning and absent the conditions that make such a refashioning possible, one is likely to experience only confusion, disconcertion, or

⁵⁶ The question remains, however, whether those in attendance would be able to "hear" or would have "escape[d] the stupefying memory" of the commercial theatre. Given the unpopularity of poetic drama, much less experimental drama, I would argue that most, if not all, in attendance would have been able to buy into and value Yeats's attempts. Additionally, it matters little that the performance was given to an invited audience; the point is less how one gains access to the performance and more how one engages with the performance.

⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso, 2011): 13. See 8ff for a discussion about the conundrum of audience passivity amongst twentieth-century playwrights and drama theorists.

⁵⁸ Active interpretation is the sort that must be begun as the aesthetic experience occurs; it is not purely retrospective although it can trigger the desire to remember and continue engaging with the original experience. In this respect it is similar to what Badiou terms an "event": that which, growing out of a rupture with the *status quo* at a particular evental site, triggers a process of fidelity, a nomination of this rupture as an event and an attempt to work through whatever potentialities the event may possess; from this working out process, a truth may possibly emerge. See Badiou's *Being & Event* (Continuum, 2005), *Ethics* (Verso, 2001), and *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford UP, 1997). Badiou differs a great deal from Rancière, given his interest in ontology; one area that does unite them and the primary reason that both prove useful for my study is their shared interest in the processes of subjectivization.

impenetrable strangeness. Yeats's notion of spectatorship all but requires a certain level of collaboration between audience members and actors. For Yeats, intimacy is about *work*: both inviting the audience to work *and* creating a performance space where work is necessary.

III. Concluding Remarks: Improperious Intimacy

This chapter has examined Yeats's questioning of what is proper to the stage and his attempts to reclaim intimacy in the theatre. What happens, though, when these two are considered in conjunction with one another? To what end does Yeats blur the line between spectator, prop, and actor while also demonstrating the productive, dialectical relationship between strangeness and intimacy?

At the Hawk's Well creates the conditions for improperious sorts of intimacy, intimacies that resist normativity and instrumentality. These intimacies' impropriety resides in the challenges they issue to the status quo. Instead of one being a subject formed (and informed) solely by hegemonic institutions and patterns of thought and behavior, one could be a subject formed *by* and *through* intimacy. As Elizabeth A. Povinelli argues, "Intimate recognition establish[es] a new subject out of the husk of the old and reset[s] the clock of the subject at zero" and "the intimate event is a semiotic operation that creates a subject, produces multiple linkages between that subject, its economy, and government, and governs the operation of these linkages" (2006, 192). Intimacy thus carries a transformative, if not dangerous, potential.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ I say dangerous because of the manner that fascist regimes utilized intimate attachment to one's nation or one's *volk*.

At the Hawk's Well, then, suggests by allowing the intimate moment to wash over oneself and by washing oneself *in* that intimate moment, one can reconstitute oneself as a subject. Cuchulain is entranced by the dance of the Guardian of the Well and then contemplates that entrancement and all of its attendant possibilities; he then decides to enter the fray of battle and be defined not by *waiting* for immortality but by actively *chasing after* immortality in battle. In addition to providing a new way of dramatic seeing and feeling, Yeats proposes a dramatically new way of being. Yeats hints at different ways of being as well as different ways that a process of subjectivization can occur.⁶⁰

What makes *At the Hawk's Well* such a striking piece of modernist drama, then, is the manner that it refuses to strike spectators with didacticism or alienation and instead invites them to explore the possibilities of more intimate encounters. The remainder of this study sees how Yeats's idea of audiences, particularly their ability to respond productively to these encounters, continues throughout the interwar years and into the postwar era. Audiences that talk back, Yeats suggests, learn not only new ways of talking and listening but might also develop new modes of sociopolitical and ethical being. Collaborating, intervening spectators carry the potential to become citizens whose interventions and joint actions carry no small purchase in the wider world. The theatre, following Yeats, is not merely a place where people learn how to act in a society, but a place where people contemplate actions in, and on, that society.

⁶⁰ The dominant discourse regarding Yeats and subjectivity revolves around the notion of political subjectivity and political subjectivization; as David Lloyd argues in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (1993), Yeats writing helped "the forging in Ireland of a mode of subjectivity apt to find its political and ethical realization in sacrifice to the nation yet to be" (59).

2. Intimacy Frustrated: Ethical Failure in Auden and Isherwood's Dramas

Dramatic action is ritual. "Real" action is directed towards the satisfaction of an instinctive need of the actor who passes thereby from a state of excitement to a state of rest. Ritual is directed towards the stimulation of the spectator who passes thereby from a state of indifference to a state of acute awareness

–W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, "Preliminary Statement" (1929)

Because you are not moving or speaking, you are not therefore a passenger. If you are seeing and hearing you are co-operating

–W. H. Auden, "7 Points about the Group Theatre" (1933)

Drama began as the act of a whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.

–W. H. Auden, "I Want the Theatre to Be..." (1935)

The dramas of W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood prompt spectators to move "from a state of indifference to a state of acute awareness" by becoming a "co-operating" or "understudy[ing]" part of the production; this chapter argues that such a movement serves as one of the single-most important shifts in the relationship between productions and audiences in twentieth-century drama. The dramas of Auden and Isherwood produced by the Rupert Doone, Robert Medley, and Ashley Dukes' Group Theatre served as a local, homegrown wing of interwar avant-garde theatre while also acting as a rebuttal to Continental interwar theories of audiences. These productions did not see audiences as needing to have the "shroud [that lies] over [their] perceptions" pulled away by the intense, shocking power of the performance that "wakes us up: nerves and heart" (Artaud 84) nor did they desire "to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude" (Brecht 57). Following from Ashley Dukes's "Dramatist and Theatre" (1924), these productions saw audience members as beings to whom the production needs "not to dictate, but to contribute; not to impose, but to collaborate" (685). Instead of being passive bodies upon whom the production operates, spectators in these dramas have a vitally important role to play.¹ Auden and

¹ Oftentimes, the spectators in Auden's *The Dance of Death* and *Paid on Both Sides* as well as the characters Mr. and Mrs. A represent the common people or the working class. The chorus in *The Dance of Death*, however, is a collection of bourgeois individuals

Isherwood *cast* the audience in the production, making them part of the “troupe,” as “7 Points about the Group Theatre” states (*Plays* 491).²

Auden and Isherwood, much like W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, view drama’s ritualistic roots as something that allows for audience collaboration with the performance.³ Ritual not only requires some modicum of collaboration or participation, it also allows for a substantive, collaborative *engagement* with the production; instead of merely moving from “a state of excitement to a state of rest,” one moves “from a state of indifference to a state of acute awareness.” Auden and Isherwood fashion dramas akin to rituals not because they employ ritualistic diction or movement; such devices would do little, after all, to separate them from Yeats or Eliot. The ritualism in Auden and Isherwood resides in how they *challenge* spectators; it is as if they view the commitment “not to dictate, but to contribute; not to impose, but to collaborate” as a potential challenge spectators can face, both as individual spectators or as members of a collective, the audience.⁴ These dramas became challenging performances not because they contain ritualistically strange diction, movement, and music but because they challenge spectators to “contribute” and “collaborate” to the meaning-making process, to play their part, to acknowledge and take up the role in which they’ve been cast. This “acute awareness,” then, develops as one takes up his or her role, whatever it may be, and learns how to play it. One transforms from a “passenger” into one who cooperates, one who has learned to behave, think, and “feel like an understudy.”

² I will refer to *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Plays and Other Dramatic Writings, 1928-1938* (Princeton UP, 1988) as *Plays*, followed by the corresponding page number.

³ The following chapter on Eliot’s dramas will discuss at greater length early twentieth century writers’ interest in linking drama and ritual. In short, these writers build off the work of the Cambridge Ritualists – Cornford, Harrison, Murray – and the work of Frazer, all of whom stress the relationship between Greek drama and Greek social, political, and religious rituals.

⁴ It should be remembered, however, that rituals always carry some measure of exclusion. Rituals contain not only a division between orthodoxy and heterodoxy but also a division between those present and participating and those not present, not participating, or altogether excluded from the ritual. I nonetheless find rituals as Auden and Isherwood use them as different than Yeats, whose intent was to produce his plays only to a small group of friends who had been given permission to attend the performance. For Auden and Isherwood, presumably anyone who was a subscriber to the Group Theatre or, after their revival, paid for admission could have been a potential collaborator and member of “the troupe.”

This transformation proves so vital not only because the spectator feels, as in considers oneself to be, an understudy, but also because one must learn to *feel* as an understudy must feel in order to play his or her role properly. Auden and Isherwood wish to engender not only a sense of playing a role and being an active participant in the performance, but also a sense of affective and intellectual exploration, of learning how to feel as another might feel. To feel in this sense requires a certain responsiveness, and much of Auden and Isherwood's dramas can be seen as an attempt to elicit and evoke the responsiveness needed for this sort of intellectual and emotive feeling.⁵ The transformation from a "passenger" to an active, "co-operating" participant also carries with it a keen attentiveness to the responsiveness required of an "understudy" audience. Cooperating, Auden and Isherwood remind us, always remains predicated upon responsivity; audience members potentially can be transformed just as much by responsiveness as they can by the agency afforded by cooperating.

This chapter discusses this transformation by examining the Group Theatre productions of Auden's *The Dance of Death* (1934) and Auden and Isherwood's second and most successful collaboration, *The Ascent of F6* (1936). These performances prove significant because their dramaturgy countered the "tame acceptance of the author's absolute authority," the dominant view of the day, with a belief that performances are "a collaborative task in which author, actor, producer, and audience are joined as partners" (Dukes 1924: 682).⁶ This notion of partnership between all involved parties remains important for three reasons: (1) it indicates how Auden and Isherwood's theories of audience represented a

⁵ Feeling in this sense requires this sort of responsiveness not merely because all attempts at commiseration and identification require some modicum of responsivity but because one learns and develops a role by responding to the text, responding to other actors, responding to the scenery, lighting, and boxing, responding to direction, and responding to the audience. Learning a role could not occur in a vacuum any more than learning to feel could occur absent any stimuli.

⁶ It should be noted, however, that at no point does Dukes term them as *equal* partners, stating instead: "the craft [the author] brings to the theatre is the greatest of the crafts" that create the play (686). Although dependent on lighting designers, producers, actors, spectators, set designers, and directors, the script provided by the author nonetheless remains indispensable.

dramatic departure from contemporaneous theories of audience, (2) shows how the Group Theatre's utilization of audience participation might have shaped the use of audience collaboration among acting troupes after the war,⁷ and (3) allows for new opportunities at the level of both the individual and the collective to effect political and social change.⁸ While my introduction and conclusion discuss the first two points, respectively, this chapter largely centers on how this sort of dramatic partnership hoped to prompt political and social change.

This chapter, then, views the "acute awareness" the individual spectator feels when taking part in a collective action, being a part of the performance as opposed to removed from it completely, not as a transitory moment of little import but instead as a moment of profound resistance to the officialdom that Forster talks about. In the late interwar era, the very act of having people work together to make meaning, to exhibit their own individual agency by contributing, has sociopolitical purchase. Instead of arguing, as Yeats does, that Auden and Isherwood "look for strength in Marxian Socialism...[and] want marching feet" (*Letters* 837), one could argue that Auden and Isherwood look for strength in individuals contributing to a collective action while also ceaselessly exploring possible dramatic forms that best allow for and elicit these contributions.⁹

Given how different this sort of dramaturgy is to the commercial dramas of Pinero, Barrie, and Coward, it is little surprise that Auden and Isherwood's dramas were seen as novel, welcome departures

⁷ The potential influence that the Group Theatre had on the Living Theatre of Julian Beck and Judith Malina (established in 1947) proves particularly interesting, especially since the Living Theatre adapted Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* for the stage in May 1954. The Living Theatre admittedly relied heavily on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, but one could perhaps see their interest in collaboration as having some roots in the Group Theatre's interwar experimental dramas.

⁸ See my introduction for a detailed explanation of how the theatrical relates to the social and political arenas. As my introduction states, spectatorship occur at the same time that questions of political participation and ethical responsibility were being asked. I consider primarily the expansion of voting rights in the interwar era (the Representation of the People Act 1918/Fourth Reform Act and Representation of the People Act 1928/Equal Voting Act) and the rise of questions about to whom are we ethically responsible. What interests me about these plays is that I see them as dramatizing both ongoing debates about and attempts to come to terms with these two issues.

⁹ I am leaving out Auden's earlier charade, *Paid on Both Sides* (1929), even though it also inventively rethinks audience participation primarily because the Group Theatre never produced it. I am also leaving out *The Dog Beneath the Skin, or Where is Francis?* (1935) because its staging lacks the inventiveness of *Dance* or *F6. On the Frontier* (1938), while mentioned briefly, will also be sidestepped because of its less than enthusiastic reception upon its première.

from the London interwar theatrical norm.¹⁰ The potentiality and panache of how *The Dance of Death* mixed pantomime, mummer's plays, cabaret, musical hall and revue performances, audience interaction, direct address, and contemporary politics prompted *New Statesman* to dub the Group Theatre's 1935 revival "of greater importance for the future of drama than all the 'masterpieces' of ... the pseudo realistic school."¹¹ The *New English Weekly* reviewer dubbed *The Dance of Death* "a whole and original fertile work in the theatre, giving hope that we may again infuse vitality into our decrepit Drama....the audience rose to demonstrate that something at last HAPPENED on a London stage."¹² The primary reason these reviewers saw *The Dance of Death* and *The Ascent of F6*¹³ as "original fertile work[s]" concerns their staging and audience interaction.¹⁴ It is little surprise, then, that these works "produced a sense of visceral excitement and intellectual engagement" amongst those who attended (Warden 2012: 2).¹⁵

The first section of this chapter, "An Intimate Troupe," specifically focuses on how *The Dance of Death* generated this "visceral excitement and intellectual engagement" via the creation of new types of attentiveness. As mentioned earlier, this "acute awareness" is the springboard that allows audiences to jump from spectatorship to "co-operating" and "feel[ing] like an understudy" (*Plays* 491, 497).¹⁶ This

¹⁰ An unnamed reviewer for *The Times* (2 October 1935) praised the plays for their "lucidity" and "general amusingness of the stage movement, the emphasis of the jazz band, and the singing and dancing are aids, not hindrances, to the assimilation of the author's ideas" (12).

¹¹ Unnamed reviewer, *New Statesman* (3 March 1934): 303. The few reviewers who saw the initial run of *Dance* praised the performance in a tone slightly above that of shock and surprise; this is because the text of the play, published in December 1933, was very poorly received, with the *Times Literary Supplement* calling it "thin" (15 March 1934: 190) and Gavin Ewart and F. R. Leavis finding it lacking in reviews for *New Verse* and *Scrutiny*, respectively.

¹² Unnamed reviewer, *New English Weekly* (12 April 1934): 617. As Richard Davenport-Hines succinctly states, *The Dance of Death* "caused a sensation when it was staged for subscribers in February 1934 and had wider acclaim when produced at the Westminster Theatre in the following year" (141).

¹³ Katherine Isherwood, who attended the première, stated in her diary that the première "went very well, every seat sold, & quite an appreciative audience"; qtd in Davenport-Hines 164.

¹⁴ These plays, then, have a notion of spectatorship similar to that Rancière articulates in *The Emancipated Spectator*. They focus less on the division between acting and viewing and more upon their imbricated relationship, how the two are always overlapping and building off of one another.

¹⁵ Among those in attendance were Bertolt Brecht, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Stephen Spender, Ottoline Morrell, Hope Mirlees, and other literati. A number of theatre practitioners and professionals were also in attendance, including Celia Johnson, Tyrone Guthrie, John Johnson, and Gillian Scaife.

¹⁶ This movement "from a state of indifference to a state of acute awareness" seems rather Brechtian but, as Edward Mendelson states in *Early Auden* (1981), Auden's dramaturgy "was intent less on autonomy and stasis than on enlightenment and action. It was formally sophisticated but concerned more with the contradictions and order of the

section considers the ways Auden utilized direct address, audience incorporation into the action, and innovative staging to foster the responsive and cooperative “acute awareness” amongst spectators. Furthermore, it argues that the momentary collaborative acts that occur in the theatre carry with them the potential to inspire new ethical frameworks and more equitable political models. Relying on the notions of spectatorship put forth by Jacques Rancière, this section examines both the “capacity of [hitherto] anonymous people” to collaborate and contribute as and the ways that “a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in” (Rancière 2011: 17, 23).

The second section of this chapter, “Ethical Failure,” focuses on Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6* and examines how it corresponds with the collaborative strategies utilized by Auden’s *The Dance of Death*. Whereas *The Dance of Death* put these strategies into play and speaks of the transformative potential that collaboration and “acute awareness” possess, *The Ascent of F6* depicts what occurs when this transformative potential remains dormant or ignored. If *The Dance of Death* concerns itself primarily about the newfound power and agency afforded to the audience by cooperating *with* the performance, *The Ascent of F6* centers on the sorts of responsivity and commitment required of a successful, liberatory collaboration. This section concludes by examining the staging of *The Ascent of F6*, arguing that the dividing of the stage into three distinct performance areas – a central performance area where the bulk of the dramatic action occurs and two stage boxes on either side, with the occupants of these stage boxes either narrating or commenting upon the actions occurring on the center of the stage – requires spectators to develop new ways of attentiveness. Auden and Isherwood explore the political, social, and ethical opportunities of this newfound attentiveness as well as the barriers that prevent these opportunities from

ethical world... –a Brechtian art, conceived independently of Brecht” (205). While Mendelson admits that “the techniques Brecht developed in depth and detail closely resembled the sketchier ones devised independently by Auden” (261), his insistence that Auden developed his ideas independently of Brecht does not account for Auden’s watching Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* whilst in Berlin. Granted, Auden’s German was poor at the time, but Brecht’s staging, lighting, costuming, juxtaposition of song and speech, as well as the audience response nonetheless would have affected Auden.

being recognized and realized. Auden and Isherwood, much like Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral* and Beckett in his postwar dramas, draw spectators' attention to the many nuances of collaboration and contribution; one's contributions and collaborative work can uphold a less than equitable *status quo* just as much as they can work to foster meaningful change.

This chapter, at its core, revolves around a simple, yet provocative principle: when spectators have the opportunity to collaborate and contribute to the construction of the drama, the potential for resulting changes in the social, political, and ethical frameworks that govern spectators increases exponentially. As Erika Fischer-Lichte states, the theatre grants spectators the chance to "construct...a reality of [their] own, [and] become aware of doing so and begin to reflect upon it. The theatre, thus, turns out to be a field of experimentation where we can test our capacity for and the possibilities of constructing reality" (1995: 104). When spectators learn to "feel like an understudy," they discover that they are prepared to play more roles than those in any given play. The roles available for them to play, Auden and Isherwood argue, go beyond any given performance's *dramatis personae*. Such spectators, given the opportunity to collaborate and respond to the performance, may eventually seek to "test [that] capacity" beyond the confines of the theatre.

I. An Intimate Troupe

the Group Theatre is a troupe, not of actors only but of
Actors
Producers
Writers
Musicians
Painters
Technicians
etc, etc, and
AUDIENCE

-W. H. Auden, "7 Points about the GROUP THEATRE" (1933)

The plays of Auden and Isherwood require collaboration from spectators. Whereas Yeats's dramaturgy required spectators to work in ways that resembled collaboration, Auden and Isherwood's scripts have areas written in for audience response; it is up to audience members to respond and fill their role in the performance.¹⁷ Collaboration between the two parties becomes less a matter of *work*, as was the case with Yeats, and more a matter of execution.¹⁸ The audience has a vital role to play in the show and remains as indispensable as the producers, writers, or technicians. As members, they neither remain passive spectators nor become actors, but play a different role in the performance. Absent them, the production would be lacking in some way just as it would be if it lacked a script, a space to perform, or players. Stating that spectators should be seen as part of the "troupe" (*Plays* 491) denotes that spectators are granted insight into what Bert States, in his seminal "Performance as Metaphor" (1996), dubs "the rehearsal atmosphere....of trial and error, seeking, interrupting, finding in general the best way to perform" (25).¹⁹ This section argues that this collaborative attempt to find "the best way to perform" possesses powerful transformative potential. This potential is clear when viewed alongside the expansion of voting rights in the interwar years and the increasing number of people who can now participate in the political process. Auden and Isherwood provide ways for the spectator to participate and contribute at a time when government is redefining what citizenry means. Contributing to the performance and helping the performance come into its own grants agency to spectators while also instilling within them a responsibility to the performance.

The very term "troupe" warrants further attention because of it designates a democratic assembly. Its root, *troppus*, possesses two primary usages: (a) piling up, heaping and cramming together,

¹⁷ This is true whether or not the audience member to be invited on the stage was planted. In *Paid on Both Sides* or *The Dance of Death*, planting would do little to change the effect. The point is that the long-standing division between actor onstage and audience off-stage is being blurred.

¹⁸ See the penultimate section of the previous chapter, particularly 29-30.

¹⁹ While the typography of "7 Points" might suggest that the "AUDIENCE" is but the last and least contributing members of the troupe, I would argue that the font type and size – the fact that it is capitalized and a seemingly larger font than the other members of the troupe – suggests that Auden saw the audience as a part of the troupe worth drawing attention to and highlighting.

and (b) a herd of animals or people.²⁰ There is an utter lack of hierarchy in the term; a troupe is either a happenstance heaping up and cramming together *or* a leaderless herd, a *demos* of sorts. There is no vertical ranking nor is there a horizontal linearity or pride of position. What exists is a cooperative, something that requires a variety of roles working together to achieve a common end. The end in this instance is a completed performance.²¹ There are two instances in *The Dance of Death* where audience response is integral to the performance being completed.

The Dance of Death (1933) announces itself as “a picture of the decline of a class,” that class being the middle class, which may “dream of a new life” but “secretly desire[s] the old, for there is death inside them” (*Plays* 83).²² Auden presents, however, not a diatribe against the bourgeoisie; instead, he offers something that draws from cabaret, musical comedies, and popular revues.²³ The play is a series of interactions between a dancer, who represents this “death inside them,” and a variety of individuals.²⁴ The dancer’s purpose in interacting is to “keep himself alive,” with the dancer “mak[ing] use of the favorite stimulants and distractions of the middle-class: sunbathing, religious patriotism, anti-Semitism, Lawrentian blood-consciousness, drugs, mysticism,” and the like (Mendelson 1981: 269). After these distractions lose their power, the dancer composes his will, naming the working class as his beneficiary,

²⁰ See J. N. Adams’s *The Regional Diversification of Latin, 200 BC – AD 600* (Cambridge UP, 2007): 324-325.

²¹ I avoid calling it a “successful performance” because success is not the point; the point is *completing* the experiment. As Auden said in “Selling the Group Theatre” (1936), “not every experiment will be a success; that should neither be expected nor desired, for much is learned from failure” (*Plays* 498). The point is that “avenues of development may be opened out, which would not otherwise have been noticed” had these experiments never been undertaken (498).

²² This combining of Freudian death drive with the Marxist notion of the decline of the bourgeoisie was common in Auden; in many respects, it is part of his desire to address both large-scale economic and political problems as well as account for and remedy private, psychological shortcomings. This interest in addressing both sociopolitical issues and psychological failings can be seen in many of Auden’s works, including *The Ascent of F6* (1936) and “September 1, 1939.”

²³ In this respect he departs from Shawian problem plays, which also dramatize the failings of the bourgeoisie. Although Shaw injects his critiques with no small amount of humor and wit, he still takes himself and his critique much more seriously than Auden. Also, at no time does Shaw incorporate the audience into his drama; they are passive bodies whom exist to hear and be awakened by his critique.

²⁴ Samuel Hynes, in *The Auden Generation* (Random House, 1976), rightly points out that the dancer “is not a character in the ordinary sense, and neither he nor anyone else in the play has any individual identity. In the world of this play, individualism does not matter” (129). Hynes’s reading of *Dance*, however, as “a parable of Marxist economics” (129) seems not quite capable of accounting for the tongue-in-cheek manner that it deals with Marx. See Adrian Casear’s *Diving Lines: Poetry, Class, and Ideology in the 1930s* (Manchester UP 1991) for an account that challenges Hynes’s reading; particularly his third chapter, “Auden and the Audenesque,” (41-66).

and dies. Despite its plot, the play never fully commits to Marxism, perhaps because Auden was “at the time...profoundly ambivalent about the possible social and political functions of art” (Jacobs 1999: 103) and was “still straddling the fence of political activism and metaphysical activism” (Izzo 2001: 119). The following pages will examine the dancer’s final moments and how the audience functions in this closing scene.

The Dance of Death remains a play rooted in the interactions between audience members and the players. Throughout the play, the audience has been directly addressed by the “Announcer” and other characters, and, much like *At the Hawk’s Well*, has had characters, namely the dancer, “enter[ing] through audience” (85) and leaving the stage either into or through the audience. Additionally, there are a number of speaking parts for “performers in the auditorium” (83), sitting alongside audience members. These “performers” generally offer further commentary to supplement the commentary given by chorus members; these performers generally speak in a heavy working class accent: “‘E’s a bit of orlright, ain’t ‘e Bill?,” “‘E took ‘em – I saw ‘im,” and “‘E wants his girlfriend. Did you see ‘im making eyes at that little bit over there on the right?” (85, 87, 98).²⁵ Furthermore, the stage, which is “bare with a simple backcloth” (83) in the style of *At the Hawk’s Well*, contains one other piece of set design: “steps [in front of the backcloth] on which the ANNOUNCER sits, like the umpire at a tennis tournament. Down stage is a jazz orchestra. In front of the conductor is a microphone” (83). The audience of *The Dance of Death*, then, is cast in the role of both spectator and evaluator. Spectators watch the performance, as a tennis audience would, but tennis audiences also watch and judge the umpire’s ability to make correct calls, maintain fair play, enforce rules, and keep the match going forward at the correct pace. As is the case in T. S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), which the next chapter will discuss in detail, the audience of *Dance* has the potential to observe, evaluate, and judge. The very staging of the play models a different sort of spectatorship, as does the manner in which players and audience members interact with one another. What I wish to examine is

²⁵ It was Auden’s usage of working class voices that F. R. Leavis took particular exception to in his *Scrutiny* review of *The Dance of Death*.

not so much these interactions, but a series of even more arresting interactions that occur at the end of the play.

After the dancer has been diagnosed and given “an injection....to let him [and the show] go on” (95), a series of striking interactions between the players and the audience members occurs. Immediately before the dancer’s final performance, the characters BOX and COX move downstage and begin speaking into the conductor’s microphone; as they speak, “*the AUDIENCE should render the appropriate noises they describe*” (101). The two characters point out various “*performers*” in the audience and narrate their actions, acting in a similar way as the musicians in *At the Hawk’s Well*. They point out goings on in the audience, stating:

BOX: ...Away to the right a member of the Green Cheese Society is making a spirited speech. David Johnstone, the six year old marvel, is thrilling a portion of the monster audience by the instantaneous conversion of logarithms into improper fractions. There are a lot of distinguished people here. [*Mentions any there may be in the audience.*] I say, Cox, can you make out with your glasses what’s going on on the left?

COX: It looks as though they had caught a pickpocket. Yes ugh, don’t look, they’re breaking his back against the railings (101).

In addition to this narration, they also elicit action from the audience. They state: “The crowd are stamping their feet and swinging their arms to keep warm,” “The crowd are frantic. The police are holding them. They’re giving way....[the dancer] is acknowledging the cheers of the crowd,” and “The crowd are holding their breath” (101). As the stage directions state, audience members “*should render the appropriate noises they describe*” (101). While one might argue *how* an audience would know to do this, the likely answer is that either one of the “*performers in the auditorium*” or a planted audience member begins the action and encourages others to follow or Box and Cox pause and strongly hint that the audience is to play along. This sort of playing along, however, ends abruptly as the dancer wavers, tries to right himself,

and then “falls and staggers being paralysed from the feet up” (102). The type of audience interaction that follows the scene narrated by Box and Cox ups the ante a great deal more, moving from directly addressing audience members to bringing them onstage and making them a part of the show.

Following the dancer’s collapse and paralysis, the Announcer and Stage Manager invite the audience onto the stage. While it is only the “performers [planted] in the auditorium” who speak, there is no reason to think that only they are intended to come forward. Should that have been the case, what would have been the point? The theatricality and literariness of the production had been well established previously, with the constant direct address, audience interaction, and use of narration. Also, by 1934, the common practices of Continental avant-garde drama, namely a focus on the theatricality and literariness of theatre, would have been less than revelatory to the sort of audience who would have attended a Group Theatre performance.²⁶ The audience is invited to the stage, with the Announcer stating, in doggerel verse:

Who is ugly

Who is sick

Who is lonely

Come on quick.

Hither.

[The AUDIENCE begin to come up on to the stage.] (102).

Edward Mendelson argues that this is “a rather impractical stage direction...[and] has a propagandistic air” (*Early Auden* 270).²⁷ Such impracticality, instead of being a dramaturgical misstep, seems very much

²⁶ It is also worth mentioning that the first performance of *The Dance of Death* was attended only by subscribers to the Group Theatre; the second production, a two-week run open to the public, was double-billed with Eliot’s *Sweeney Agonistes*. Needless to say, an audience who’d attend this performance would likely have some familiarity with common avant-garde practices like direct address and a focus on diegetic modes of discourse.

²⁷ Mendelson continues, stating: “Brecht was now arguing...[that] an audience implicated in the stage action, and made to feel like a participant in it, is not educated at all. Instead it loses its capacity for independent action and becomes the playwright’s passive instrument” (270). I would argue instead that education is but part of the point;

the point.²⁸ The “pseudo-realistic school” of Coward, Maugham, and the like had a *practical* view of audience, that of a passive audience who paid money, observed, and were entertained. What Auden sought to do was create an intimacy akin to that Yeats sought to inspire in his 1910s-1920s dance plays. The “pseudo-realistic school” derided by Yeats for its “stage-opening, powerful light and shade, the number of feet between myself and the players” was also seen by Auden as not only having destroyed intimacy but as having curtailed theatrical experimentation.²⁹

In addition to opening up an intimate relation between actors and spectators, bringing the audience onstage and having them partake in the dramatic action draws attention to the relationship between *intimacy* and *intimating*.³⁰ While Yeats emphasizes the relationship between closeness and unbridgeable distance always contained in intimacy/intimate relationships, Auden offers something slightly different. Auden, like Yeats, does in fact bring audience members closer to the dramatic action while also clearly noting that spectators are not equivalent to players but something utterly different. Auden, however, departs from Yeats by illustrating the double-valences of the verb form of *intimating*, which can mean something formally announced as well as something hinted at, something that is stated indirectly. As the statements of the “*performers in the auditorium*” who speak onstage illustrate, the

independent action rarely comes from education alone but is also a matter of affective commitment, which might be what Auden was seeking to elicit by having the audience become a part of the play instead of an educated body. Additionally, Brecht’s view of spectatorship doesn’t consider the ways in which spectators are always already actively interpreting the work presented before them.

²⁸ Whilst bringing audience members onstage during the performance might seem impractical, having audience members seated onstage is not entirely impractical. More recent plays, in particular Peter Shaffer’s *Equus* (1973), has audience members seated onstage during the entire performance. The audience sits upstage on “tiers of seats in the fashion of a dissecting theatre....During the play, Dysart addresses them directly from time to time, as he addresses the main body of the theatre” (13-14). As my introduction argues, the staging of these dramas comes to the fore in postwar dramatic production. The immersive dramas of Griselda Gambaro are also an example of this, as are the 2012 productions of Cynthia von Buhler’s interactive *Speakesy Dollhouse* and San Francisco’s We Players immersive production of *The Odyssey*, which was performed across 800 acres in Angel Island State Park.

²⁹ See “Selling the Group Theatre” for Auden’s views on the need for theatrical experimentation.

³⁰ The verb form of “intimate” shares the same root as the adjectival and nominative form: *intimus*. They also share the same verb root, *intimāre*. As Dumesnil states, *intimus* is synonymous with *necessarius*, which means “one particularly united by blood or friendship” (1809: 380)

audience members' statements are a mixture of intimate details left largely half-said or but hinted at *and* formal declarations of affinity with the dancer. Take for example, audience member η , who states:

To-day my dog died. No sound greeted my footstep on the stair. I could not stay at home. Had overheard last Autumn in the office, Crowder speaking of his, forgotten until now. My name is Alfred Jones. Please speak to me (103).³¹

Audience member η provides intimate details, namely his dog's death, but he does not directly state his pain. Fellow audience members instead see him talking *around* this pain, speaking of the lack of "sound [that] greeted [his] footstep on the stair" and recalling his overhearing about a co-worker's losing his pet "last Autumn." Additionally, Auden combines this with direct statement and formal announcement, with η stating his given name, "Alfred Jones," and entering a plea, stating, "Please speak to me."

This is not to say, however, that intimacy in *Dance* exists primarily in a grammatical sense or is only a function of intimated expressions. This mixture of Jones's attempting to mask his pain as well as his directly pleading for an interlocutor occurs whilst he is surrounded by his fellow audience members. Auden wants fellow spectators and attentive readers to experience the affective power of seeing another suffering being who is in need of aid and calling out for a response. Auden, like Yeats, wants spectators to do intimate work.³² For Auden, this work is less a matter of attentiveness alone, as was the case with Yeats, and more a matter of combining attentiveness and responsiveness.

Including the audience proves so integral to Auden's dramaturgy because he sees their inclusion as helping him fashion a new sort of spectator. In "I Want the Theatre to Be..." (1935), Auden sees "that drama can only deal, directly at any rate, with the relations of human beings with each other" (497-498) and not with larger "relations of Man to the rest of nature" (498). Furthermore, in the later "Are You Dissatisfied with This Performance?" (1936), Auden argues "for a vital theatre, neither drawing-room drama, nor something private and arty, but a social force" (500). Having the audience serve as part of the

³¹ Auden utilized lowercase Greek letters α through θ to indicate those performers who were in the audience.

³² See the penultimate section of the previous chapter, particularly 29-30.

troupe makes all the more clear how drama deals “with the relations of human beings with each other” and goes a long way towards making it more of “a social force.” The very performance of *The Dance of Death* requires players and spectators to experiment with new ways of “relat[ing]...with each other.” This experimentation in turn creates the potential for new patterns of response, new ways of engaging with the societal bodies of which one is a part. By calling such a body of intimate troupers into being, Auden creates the potential for a more ethically aware and politically committed spectator. Drama, for Auden, becomes “a social force” when it ceases trying to force itself and its ideas unilaterally upon spectators and instead allows spectators to respond to and interact with the performance. Auden’s dramaturgy posits an equality between spectators and players; by having spectators speak, he illustrates “the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.”³³ As *The Dance of Death* shows, Auden is not interested in either educating an audience about the necessity of putting their shoulder behind the wheel and pushing, nor is he interested in shocking an audience into realizing the need to put their shoulder behind the wheel. His dramaturgy, despite surface similarities, has little correspondence with Brecht’s and even less with Artaud’s. Auden instead creates a drama that needs audience members to help push it forward.³⁴ Audience members become collaborators in a substantive way and these momentary collaborative acts, for Auden and Isherwood, carry with them the potential to inspire new ethical frameworks and more equitable political models.

As Auden said in “I Want the Theatre to Be...” (1935), drama “in fact deals with the general and universal” but not directly: directly it can only concern itself with “the relations of human beings with

³³ Rancière’s *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 30. Rancière sees the presupposition of the equality of all speaking beings as being “the undoing of the police order...[because] Anyone capable of understanding an order is no longer in need of one...it is the presupposition of those who act...the presupposition of the part that has no part, when that part decides to assert itself in the public realm in the name of its own equality” (May 2007: 24). See Todd May’s “Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality” (2007) and the closing pages of the third chapter of Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Stanford UP, 1991): 65-73.

³⁴ I am invoking postwar avant-garde film director’s Lindsay Anderson’s “Get Out and Push!” (1957), which in many respects discusses the problems that Auden and Isherwood dramatize: “our problems today are all problems of adjustment: we have somehow to evolve new social relationships within the nation, and a new relationship with the world outside...how can a tired old vision [such as those held by old Leftists, the Labour Party, or Tories] expect to win new allegiances today?” (18).

each other" (497-498). It can, however, deal with the "general" indirectly in the manner that it inspires audience members to work together to effect sociopolitical change. Having audience members serve as collaborators, acting as an intimate, integral part of the troupe, should be seen, then, as the cornerstone in Auden's dramatic philosophy. While Auden highlights the "capacity of [hitherto] anonymous people" via his inclusion of the audience, his reason for doing is simple: "[to] help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in" (Rancière 2011: 17, 23).

II. Ethical Failure

Whereas the *Dance of Death* focused on "capacity of [hitherto] anonymous people" to enact or promote sociopolitical or ethical change, the Auden-Isherwood collaboration, *The Ascent of F6* (1936) illustrates what occurs when the potential to effect these changes remains unrealized or is ignored. The ethical failure discussed in this section is a *failure of ethical systems*, of how the dominant ethical discourses of the day could not address adequately the sociopolitical, economic, or ethical quandaries facing interwar Britain. Ethical failure, then, does not entail a ham-fisted Hegelianism where one's failure allows for successes of another sort to occur. It neither indicates a failing that can be ethically justified like Marlow's lying to Kurtz's fiancée at the conclusion of *Heart of Darkness* or Nora's committing fraud to raise money to take Torvald abroad to save his life in *A Doll's House* nor does it denote a failure to act in what one could loosely term an ethical way. Ethical failure in *The Ascent of F6* exposes a philosophical lacuna, a gap that the ethical systems of the day cannot bridge.

The Ascent of F6 demonstrates, then, the failure of ethics during the interwar era. The reason the ethical challenges presented in *The Ascent of F6* remain unmet is not just because the protagonist, Michael Ransom, simply fails to meet them; what is at stake is larger than a personal failing. Auden and

Isherwood, as their previous collaboration, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935), illustrates, did not examine the private, psychological shortcomings of disparate individuals alone but also considered political, economic, and social inequalities. The ethical challenges in *The Ascent of F6* remain unmet because there was no ethical framework capable of addressing them; Ransom fails because he relies upon an outmoded deontology that cannot adequately address the ethical quandaries facing him. *The Ascent of F6* does not, however, merely present audiences with unmitigated failure and leave it at that. Instead, Auden and Isherwood anticipate postwar and contemporary ethical frameworks, particularly those focusing on responsibility and emancipatory equality.³⁵

The Ascent of F6 tells the story of mountaineer Michael Ransom's ill-fated expedition to summit the fictional mountain F6. Ransom and his fellow mountaineers, after reservations, accept a government commission to climb F6. F6, a mountain considered sacred by locals, serves as the border between the colonies of British Sudoland and Ostnian Sudoland. Ransom and his crew are racing against an Ostnian crew attempting to reach the summit of the "Haunted Mountain" first because it would benefit their imperial aims in the fictional colony Sudoland. F6 straddles the border between British Sudoland and its rival, the fictional Ostnian Sudoland, and Sudolandian lore casts the mountain as haunted "by a guardian demon...no native will set foot upon it" (*Plays* 301). Legend has it that the first one who "reaches the summit of F6, will be lord over *both* the Sudolands, with his descendants, for a thousand years" (302). Ransom, despite his misgivings at being a pawn of the government and industrial powers that be, agrees to summit the mountain. Ransom, however, refuses to act out of "prestige, tactics, money, and the privately pre-arranged meanings of familiar words," recognizing that the expedition, although enticing because of the challenge, is "nothing more or less than a political racket" (310, 311). In short, he wants to

³⁵ I am speaking primarily of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Rancière. Grouping Rancière and Levinas might seem odd given that Rancière argues against the "Ethical Turn" in the penultimate chapter of *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (Continuum, 2010), this does not mean that his work has no place for the ethical. See "Community of Equals" in *On the Shores of Politics*, 63-92 and May's "Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality" (2007). What Rancière opposes is not art that contains some sort of ethical content but art that is in the service of a particular *ethos* or aids in the production of a given *ethos*.

make the expedition something done on his own terms and not for the benefit of the powers-that-be.

The expedition proves to be ill-fated, as he and almost all of his fellow mountaineers die on the attempt to summit the mountain.

The Ascent of F6 was, by far, Auden and Isherwood's most successful collaboration.³⁶ Despite its success, however, it receives scant critical attention;³⁷ perhaps the reason that *The Ascent of F6* continues to be ignored stems from the fact that its ending never "resolve[s] the play's political and ethical issues" (Mendelson 1981: 254) and Auden's own admission in 1950 that "we never did get that ending right" (Bloomfield 1972: 21).³⁸ Rather than continuing to explore the play's lack of a coherent ending, this study considers how the play calls into question the ethical frameworks available to Auden and Isherwood in the 1930s while also anticipating postwar ethical developments. The play, then, should not be seen as a failure for *not* resolving certain issues; instead, its presenting of issues that were *unresolvable at the time* makes it worthy of increased attention. As John Lehmann, in his 1940 retrospective *New Writing in Europe*

³⁶ *The Ascent of F6* was revived more than any of Auden and Isherwood's other collaborations and had a fairly successful West End revival at the Little Theatre in April 1937 and a revival at the Old Vic in June 1939. Its success prompted Auden and Isherwood to consider debuting their next drama, *On the Frontier*, at a West End theatre as opposed to the Westminster Theatre or the Mercury Theatre, as they had with previous plays. Stephen Spender, in *The Thirties and After* (1978) stated that although these dramas lack the poetic brilliance of Auden's poetry or the subtlety of character in Isherwood's novels, its success shows that there "is little reason to doubt that, given sufficient commercial backing, plays [like *F6*] could not be as successful as any popular revue, and would command a great deal more attention from their audiences" (37).

³⁷ An exception to this is Lawrence Normand's "Modernity and Orientalism in W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6*." Normand, however, while discussing subjectivity and alterity, focuses instead on how "Auden's oriental reading was typical of the British turn to the Orient in the early twentieth century....[where] the turn to the East was also used to critique the West" (540). Examining *The Ascent of F6* in light of what it *fails* to accomplish has been a mainstay of Auden criticism, from Joseph Warren Beach's *The Making of the Auden Canon* (1957) to texts as recent as Edward Mendelson's *Early Auden* (1981), Rainer Emig's *W. H. Auden: Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (2000), and Peter Edgerly Firchow's *W. H. Auden: Contexts for Poetry* (2002).

³⁸ Auden's final attempt at getting it "right" was in 1945 for a production at the Little Theatre Club at Swarthmore College, where he served as instructor from 1942-1945. All total, Auden and Isherwood composed 7 different endings for the play over a 9-year span: the first Faber edition, the Random House edition published in America (which largely preserves the first edition's ending but has some minor dialogue changes), the second Faber edition (which is the version cited from in this essay), the version for the 1937 Group Theatre production, amended by Rupert Doone and Isherwood while Auden was in Spain (now lost), the promptbook version for the 1939 Group Theatre revival, a revised ending written shortly after Auden and Isherwood arrived in New York that was performed by The Drove Players in April and was scheduled to be produced by Burgess Meredith but never occurred, and Auden's 1945 ending for the Little Theatre Club production. See Edward Mendelson's "Textual Notes" for *Plays and Other Dramatic Works, 1928-1938* (598-652) and Bloomfield and Mendelson's *W.H. Auden: A Bibliography* (20-24).

argues, the Auden Group and others “were conscious of great social, political, and moral changes going on around them, and [they] became increasingly convinced that it was their business to communicate their vision of this process” (13). These writers, then, focused less on literary success and aesthetic coherence than on their deep-seated desire to document and respond to the varied “social, political, and moral changes” in England and Europe. Accounting for the ways that Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6* responds to and attempts to come to terms with moral changes will show how they depict the unsuitability of the ethical models at their disposal. In particular, *The Ascent of F6* challenges W. D. Ross’s pluralistic deontology, showing it incapable of addressing the ethical situations presented in the play.³⁹ Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6* becomes more than a warning about striving for “a unity [that] the will tries constantly and confusedly to regain” (Mendelson 1981: 252). It becomes a withering critique of any attempt to develop an ethical system built around stable, unified senses of duty and obligation.⁴⁰

Auden and Isherwood present a drama that addresses the “social, political, and moral changes” occurring at the time. The 1930s, as Valentine Cunningham states in *British Writers of the Thirties* (1988), saw many “grimly sensing and declaring a crisis,” becoming keenly attuned to the “nauseous gruesomeness pervading life and art in [these] times” (36). Michael Roberts further notes in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936) that many works were predicated on “a crisis of a general kind” (4). The time for older ethical frameworks, even one as fluid as Ross’s, had seemingly passed.⁴¹ Auden and Isherwood’s

³⁹ Deontological ethics (rule-based ethics) concerns itself with what we *ought* to do; the unicity of Ross’s deontology resides in his wedding intrinsic goods (virtue, pleasure, the apportionment of pleasure to virtue and pain to vice, and knowledge) and moral requirements (promote the good, fidelity, reparation, gratitude, and non-maleficence). Ross argued that there was no single master principle to determine the rightness of an action, but a number of fundamental moral requirements that cannot be reduced to a single requirement.

⁴⁰ *The Ascent of F6*, then, resembles Rancière in two respects: (a) how its tripartite staging hopes to create audience members “who, in their constant attention to themselves and in their endless revolving around the truth, find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others” (Rancière 1991: 72), and (b) how it illustrates what happens to politics when the “presupposition of equality...[through which] domination becomes intolerable” (May 2007: 25) is lacking

⁴¹ I dub Ross’s deontology as “fluid” because his work is a third deontological way that avoids utilitarianism without being overly Kantian. Ross argues that there are indeed self-evident propositions at the core of ethics, propositions that are substantiated by moral facts that can be discovered via reflecting on our own views of moral and axiological questions. Ross has found newfound import over the past decade as thinkers grapple with both applied ethics and

The Ascent of F6 documents this passing while pointing to an ethical framework more fit for a “crisis, things going wrong” (Cunningham 36). In place of this deontology, *The Ascent of F6* provides a trenchant account of the political, social, and ethical failings of their crises-laden historical moment. The first portion of the following section examines both the extent and the import of Auden and Isherwood’s cutting critique of contemporaneous ethical theories and their inability to deal with all the “things going wrong” in the 1930s.

The following subsection, “Refusing Election,” will discuss the role of election in relation to Ransom’s ethical failures.⁴² Just as *The Dance of Death* depicted people calling out to others for comfort and aid from the vantage point of the sufferer, *The Ascent of F6* examines this calling out from that of the hearer and responder. Auden and Isherwood provide spectators with the opportunity to see how the failure of ethical frameworks affect individuals charged with responding to those in need. Audiences see how *not* to respond to those in need as well as the *dangers* of collaboration; as Auden stated in “Selling the Group Theatre” (1936), “much is learned from failure” (486).

Refusing Election

Examining *The Ascent of F6* through an ethical lens shows how Auden and Isherwood reframe the basic ethical questions of who is responsible to whom and in what ways one is responsible to and for others. Election, as articulated in Levinas’s *Totality & Infinity* (1961), “is revealed to be a privilege and a

debates over whether ethical frameworks should correspond to common-sense morality. See Robert Audi’s *The Good in the Right* (2004) Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress’s *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (2008), and Philip Stratton-Lake’s “Recalcitrant Pluralism” (2011).

⁴² Levinas has his many detractors, including thinkers as different as Oona Aizenstat, Alain Badiou, Leora Batnitzky, Judith Butler, Catherine Chalié, Robert Gibbs, Dominique Janicaud, Samuel Moyn. Nonetheless, Levinas remains valuable for ethical inquiry because he removes the unconditional ethical imperative from the realm of rationality; his phenomenology of this imperative is located in the pre-rational. As Fagenblat’s *A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas’s Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford UP, 2010) states, Levinas provides “a pre-rational but still categorical imperative” (xix). Ethics is not a matter of rationality; I argue that Auden and Isherwood, by showing the limits of rationality and ethical frameworks predicated on reason, anticipate Levinas’s later developments. I find the continual critique that Levinasian philosophy has little to say about political change to be eliding how Levinas could be seen to inject something pre-rational into the regime of rational discourse that goes by the name of “politics” today.

subordination, because it does not place [the elected] among the other chosen ones, but rather in the face of them, to serve them, and because no one can be substituted for the I to measure the extent of its responsibilities" (279). Election, then, does not create an ethical hierarchy of any sort; one cannot *choose* to be elected nor does election transfigure the elected into one of the "chosen ones." Levinas refines this definition further in a 1982 interview and a 1985 lecture, both later collected in *Entre Nous: On Thinking of the Other*, stating that "election is...the fundamental characteristic of the human person as morally responsible" (1998: 108) and that it is "the uniqueness of he who does not allow himself to be replaced" (1998: 168). Election, then, while predicated on pre-intellectual affective experience, remains rooted in a direct response to another being in need.⁴³

This ethics of responsibility differs greatly from the ethical frameworks available to Auden and Isherwood in the mid-1930s. While the moral philosophy of G.E. Moore was undoubtedly influential in the interwar era, it had little purchase with Auden and Isherwood. As Peter Firchow rightly points out in his analysis of Auden's *The Orators* (1932), Auden had little patience with "the aloofness of the Bloomsbury Group as a whole from political involvement...[or] the apolitical tradition of Cambridge linguistic philosophy" (2002: 125). The idea of turning ethical engagement into a matter of language held little interest for Auden and Isherwood, writers so heavily invested in pressing sociopolitical, economic, and ethical questions. The ethical framework employed by Ransom, then, bears little resemblance to the ideas of Moore, Ayer, Russell, or Wittgenstein; instead, it is rooted more in the fluid deontology of W. D. Ross. Auden likely would have encountered Ross's philosophy and would have been aware of its basic

⁴³ See "Filiality and Fraternity" (278-281) in *Totality & Infinity* for a discussion of election and how one "owes his unicity to the paternal election" (279). In response to charges of paternalism, Levinas states, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Stanford UP, 1998): "As to the objection...that this idea of responsibility implies a certain paternalism: 'You are responsible for the other and it is indifferent to you that the other might have to accept your responsibility'" (93). As Merold Westphal states in *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Indiana UP, 2008), Levinasian ethical theory "knows nothing of superior wisdom, nor of a duty the Other has to submit to my guidance. It knows only my responsibility for the Other's use or misuse of her freedom. It is my job, not to make the Other just like me, but to help the Other" (70).

tenets given that Ross held the renowned White's Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Oxford (1923-1928) while Auden was a student at Oxford (1925-1928).⁴⁴

Ross's philosophy focuses on *prima facie*, non-obligatory duties that provide moral reasons for acting appropriately. Ross, in *The Right and the Good* (1930), argues that it is the past that governs one's actions: "[w]hat makes [an agent] think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so—that and, usually, nothing more" (17). Levinas, in turn, argues that the moral reason for acting ethically comes not from a pre-existing promise but from an encounter with alterity, which creates a new situation and as such resists pre-existing modes of thought. The moment of ethical responsibility that results from election is both "a rupture of continuity, and a continuation across this rupture" (1969: 284). This means of understanding ethics differs greatly from Ross's belief in a stable rubric for moral action -- the belief that "the moral convictions of thoughtful and well-educated people are the data of ethics" because the "verdicts of the moral consciousness of the best people are the foundation on which [the theorist] must build" (41).

As Auden and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6* shows, the "best" and "well-educated" oftentimes are those who create and seek to profit from crises and "things going wrong." Auden and Isherwood's anticipation of postwar ideas of ethical responsibility springs from their deep distrust of those whose verdicts Ross sees as "foundational" as well as their suspicion that "the cumulative product of the moral reflection of many generations" (Ross 41) can do little to address the questions arising in the 1930s.⁴⁵

Ross's deontology, to say the least, remains the sort of ethical framework about which Auden and

⁴⁴ It is also highly likely that Auden encountered Aristotle through either Ross's commentaries on *Physics*, *Parva Naturalia*, *Analytica*, and *De Anima*, or translations of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1908) and *Metaphysics* (1924). Ross was considered one of the major Aristotelians of his day and his essays on ethics are few compared to his various works on Aristotle.

⁴⁵ This interest in ethical quandaries and responsibility to alterity not only anticipates Levinas's postwar developments but also serves as a test case of the ethical questions explored in Auden and Isherwood's more mature poetry, prose, and criticism. The ethical questions raised in *The Ascent of F6* serve as the foundation of later discussions of ethical responsibility in Auden's *For the Time Being* (1941), where Mary realizes and accepts that "she has been chosen to be the one responsible for [Jesus's] suffering...[for] the anxiety and temptation that will accompany him every moment of his life" (Conniff 57), and in Isherwood's withering indictment of how the 1930s cultivated an indifference to the suffering of others in *Prater Violet* (1945).

Isherwood had deep misgivings. With its reliance on “the data of ethics,” it cannot adequately address the primary ethical quandary in *The Ascent of F6*.

The primary ethical situation in *The Ascent of F6* revolves around its protagonist, the famed mountaineer Michael Ransom, and his deciding whether to accept the government commission to lead an expedition to climb the mountain F6.⁴⁶ The first act serves as little more than the British elite, consisting of Michael’s brother Sir James Ransom, Lady Isabel Welwyn, newspaper magnate Lord Stagmantle, and Michael and Sir James’s mother, Mrs. Ransom, attempting to convince Michael to accept the commission. Michael views his refusal as “hav[ing] triumphed” because acceptance would “Estrange me even from myself” (312). Mrs. Ransom, however, persuades him to make the expedition in order to show that he is “the truly strong [man]” who has “the power to act alone” (313); furthermore, she accuses Michael of petty sibling animosity: “...but when the moment came/To choose the greatest action of his life/ He could not do it.... [because] he was padlocked to a brother’s hatred– ” (314). Michael quickly capitulates after this statement, saying, “Go to James and tell him that you won./ And may it give him pleasure” (314). Michael’s final sentence denotes a begrudging acceptance; it lacks the tone of one who has been logically convinced or outmaneuvered argumentatively. It seems that Michael concedes defeat more than accept the commission willingly. Michael’s fears of having betrayed himself and his values manifest themselves quickly in the following scene, Act II, Scene 1, which is set at a monastery at the foot of F6 that serves as the expedition’s base camp.

Act II, Scene 1 opens with a workaday, pedestrian scene of Michael Ransom going over supplies with his longtime mountaineering partner, Ian Shawcross. They are soon joined by the remainder of the expedition -- Dr. Thomas Williams, David Gunn, and Edward Lamp -- and begin to discuss the upcoming ascent. Their discussion, however, is interrupted by a ritual procession of the monks of the monastery,

⁴⁶ Ransom is in many ways modeled after Auden’s older brother, the geologist, explorer, and mountaineer John Bicknell Auden; *The Ascent of F6* is dedicated to him.

which is done “to propitiate the spirits which guard the house of the dead” (323). During this procession, “a cowed MONK enters, carrying in his hands a crystal which glows faintly with a bluish light” (323) that seems to show the future but really only reveals, as the Abbot later states, “what we have hidden from ourselves; the treasure we have buried and accursed” (327). Along with the others, Ransom takes a turn looking into the crystal, but instead of sharing his vision as his fellow mountaineers did, he takes “a long pause” and says, “I can see nothing” (325). Ransom, however, is presented with a vision unlike that of his fellow mountaineers, who dreamed of comfort and success. After his fellow mountaineers leave to prepare for the ascent, Ransom questions his vision, saying:

Let me look again and prove my vision a poor fake. Was it to me they turned their rodent faces, those denizens of the waterfronts, and squealed so piteously: “Restore us! Restore us to our uniqueness and our human condition.” [?] Was it for me the prayer of the sad artist on the crowded beaches was indeed intended? “Assassinate my horrible detachment. My love for these bathers is hopeless and excessive. Make me also a servant.” I thought I saw the raddled sick cheeks of the world light up at my approach as the home-coming of an only son....How could I tell [Gunn, Lamp, Shawcross, and Thomas] that? (325-326).

While Ransom’s code of refusing commissions that curry “prestige, tactics, money, and the privately pre-arranged meanings of familiar words” (310) may not have been compromised in theory by his acceptance of the F6 expedition, Ransom begins to fear that it has been compromised in practice. Ransom, by accepting this commission, has given root to his “solitary pride” allowing it to blossom into a self-congratulatory “regard[ing of] himself as a healer given to man” (Mendelson 252). This commission allowed, if not mandated, that Ransom re-cast himself from being a critic of his own “era of unlimited and effortless indulgence....justifying every baseness and excusing every failure” (295) into “a Shelleyan legislator whose role will soon be acknowledged by an enormous public” (Mendelson 251). This is a far

cry from the Levinasian conception of ethical respondent as one “who knows nothing of superior wisdom, nor of a duty the Other has to submit to my guidance” (Westphal 2008: 70). Ransom’s long conversation with the Abbot, and the ethical call to responsibility that comes during this conversation, exemplifies the extent of this compromise, what it says about Ransom’s own value system, and how Ransom’s value system and ethical worldview are proved insufficient to the challenges put forth by this compromise.

The Abbot and Ransom’s conversation revolves around an in-depth discussion of temptation, a striking fact given that Ransom’s interest in all belief systems is strictly anthropological. Temptation remains an interesting topic of discussion given that the root of temptation is *temptāre*, which means to attempt, to try. Temptation, however, in standard present usage does not denote “to try” but a specific sort of “trying”: temptation denotes the trying or performing of an action that could cause one to renege on one’s responsibilities and commitments. The discussion specifically centers on the “Demon” that haunts F6.⁴⁷ The Abbot explains that the demon is not corporeal but

To the complicated and sensitive like yourself, Mr. Ransom, his disguises are more subtle. He is -- what shall I say? -- the formless terror in the dream, the stooping shadow that withdraws itself as you wake in the half-dawn. You have heard his gnashing accusations in the sinister contours of a valley or the sudden hostility of a copse or the choking apprehension that fills you unaccountably in the middle of the most intimate dinner party (326-327).

It is telling that the disguises referenced above so clearly correspond to both the accusations of Mrs.

Ransom, namely how Ransom is “padlocked” by his hatred of James, and Ransom’s own fears of how

⁴⁷Lucy McDiarmid, in *Saving Civilization: Yeats, Eliot, and Auden Between the Wars* (Cambridge UP, 1984), states: “There is a good argument for saying that the famous demon of F6...is the audience, and that Mother is the ultimate audience for whom Michael performs” (83). She also argues, “the recurrent motif [in the Auden-Isherwood collaborations] is the relation of speaker to audience, each work seems to be exploring its own social role” (73). While I find her locating the *temptation* of the demon as the *temptation to perform a given social or familial role* an intriguing and plausible notion, I am less interested in the nature of the temptation itself than the manner that Ransom confronts it.

accepting this commission has compromised his code to never seek out personal glory or financial advantage. The demon is characterized as dream-like, fleeting, but also something that cannot be confronted directly since the demon's accusations manifest themselves in valleys, copses, and dinner parties: situations where no single, directly visible interlocutor is present. Equally telling are the places where the accusations are heard: above valleys, facing a copse from below or ground level, or where one is eye-to-eye and in close quarters with others. In short, no setting can offer respite to Ransom: should he summit a mountain, the accusations can be heard as he looks out over the valleys below; the heavily-coppiced, placid lands around his Lake District home likely resound with these hostile accusations; even settings where Ransom's charm, conversational skills, and erudition would put him at ease see him struck silent with "choking apprehension."

Their discussion, however, shifts when the Abbot begins to speak about what the expedition has come to mean for Ransom. The Abbot knows that Ransom desires to "conquer the Demon [that haunts F6] and then to save Mankind" because Ransom believes that he "would do [humankind] much good. Because men desire evil, they must be governed by those who understand the corruption of their hearts, and can set bounds to it" (327). At first glance, this does not oppose Ransom's refusal to pursue "prestige, tactics, money, and the privately pre-arranged meanings of familiar words" (310). The Abbot continues, however, stating:

As long as the world endures, there must be order, there must be government: but woe to the governors, for, by the very operation of their duty, however *excellent*, they themselves are destroyed. For you can only rule men by appealing to their fear and their lust: government requires the exercise of *the human will*: and the human will is from the Demon (327, emphases mine).

Excellence in fulfilling one's duty as a governor of others, whether one is an elected official or an unacknowledged Shelleyan legislator, results in failure because in order to rule excellently he or she must

give into the temptation to reclaim the “unity [that] the will tries constantly and confusedly to regain” (Mendelson 252). One becomes something more akin to a redeemer than one elected to serve; a redeemer, that is, who requires or requests nothing from others, who needs little aside from his or her own ability and intellect.⁴⁸

Despite acknowledging both the wrongheadedness of his promise and that his desire to fulfill his duty “is from the Demon,” Ransom continues on with the expedition. Ransom, by focusing on past promises, locates the ethical moment of obligation solely in the *past*; ethical action does not correspond to some “general character which makes right acts right” but corresponds instead with the promises and actions one has made in the past (Ross 1930: 16).⁴⁹ Someone fulfilling a promise or otherwise fulfilling an ethical duty

does so with no thought to its total consequences, still less with any opinion that these are likely to be the best possible. He thinks in fact much more of the past than of the future. What makes him think it right to act in a certain way is the fact that he has promised to do so -- that and, usually, nothing more. That his act will produce the best possible consequences is not his reason for calling it right (Ross 1930: 17).⁵⁰

The Ascent of F6 clearly complicates dominant interwar notions of duty because what arguably constitutes the most un-ethical action of the play is Ransom’s wrongheadedly making a promise and then

⁴⁸ Being a redeemer or being redeemed can obviously be seen as in a positive light; Auden and Isherwood are not stating that redemption per se is the problem. What concerns them is how people continually cry out to be redeemed instead of exhibiting agency, that people want redemption as a panacea for thinking, feeling, suffering, or acting.

⁴⁹ Consequentialism, in contrast, looks to the future outcomes and consequences as the primary proofs for determining whether an action can be judged ethical. The deeming of something as ethical can only occur once the action has been completed and one can examine its results; as such, one is in some respects judging the results/ends as opposed to the action itself/means by which that end was achieved.

⁵⁰ Fidelity, along with the duties to reparation and gratitude, generally outweighs the *prima facie* duty to promote the good because of the “highly personal character of duty” (1930: 22). Ross places a high value on one’s ability to take part in obligation-generating relationships such as that “of promisee to promiser, of creditor to debtor...and the like” (1930: 19). While Ross’s conception seems at times akin to a code of honor, one should remember how discovery and reflection function in his ethics; one discovers the truth of self-evident propositions by reflecting on one’s own ideas and feelings about moral questions. It is not simply a code one lives by but a deontology one discovers as self-evidently true via reflection.

his doggedly refusing to break it. What *The Ascent of F6* presents spectators with, then, is a moment when an ethics of intuition meets a situation so beyond the status quo that Ransom possesses no past framework by which to judge or plot his next action.⁵¹ What the play tacitly posits in place of inductively intuitive ethics is an ethics of response, one predicated on responding affectively to a situation: an ethics of responsibility, of responding immediately and appropriately to alterity, as opposed to an ethics of adhering to past precedents. The final half of the conversation between the Abbot and Ransom illustrates how Auden and Isherwood frame the tension between these two theories and why a decade of “crisis, things going wrong,” such as the 1930s, required new ethical models.

The Abbot, after indicating the dangers of exercising authority, provides Ransom with an alternative: “To remain here and make the complete abnegation of the will” (328). Instead of urging Ransom to utilize the prestige and position he has accrued to work to better the lives of those over whom he will have sway, the Abbot advocates that Ransom extricate himself completely from British society.⁵² This is not a simplistic solving of the problem by retreating from it or ignoring it. Instead, it reiterates the Abbot’s earlier point regarding how “most men long to be delivered from the terror of thinking for themselves” and how one can “only rule men by appealing to their fear and their lust” (327). The Abbot’s points regarding governance and those governed, however, should not be seen as a critique of government *per se*, but of a certain sort of government: one that relies on coercion and propaganda as opposed to consent and citizens working together to make decisions for themselves.⁵³ The Abbot’s offer,

⁵¹ In short, a focus on the past and what Ross later terms in *The Foundation of Ethics* as “intuitive induction” (1939: 170) cannot adequately deal with an ethical situation that constitutes a “rupture of continuity” (Levinas 1969: 284).

⁵² It is important to not conflate the Abbot’s ideas with Auden’s own; Auden felt that one, as a part of society, could not simply extricate oneself from it. For Auden, one must find ways of responding to and challenging the communities of which one is a part. The reasoning behind the Abbot’s suggestion has a great deal to do with the way Ransom began and the sort of leader that he is and is becoming. Much like Dante’s Ulysses, who wrongly relies on rhetoric and affect to get men to buy into his plans instead of his own leadership ability, Ransom leads his men to ruin. Also, while Auden’s interest in religion, particularly Christianity, was increasing during this time, *F6* predates his 1940 return to the Anglican Communion as well as Isherwood’s 1941 introduction to Vedantic Hinduism.

⁵³ Auden, in a 1938 essay entitled “Democracy’s Reply to the Challenge of Dictators,” argues that the coercive, propagandistic governments believe that there are only a few who “are capable of making a moral choice...and that the rest of mankind must be disciplined by propaganda and coercion of one kind or another so that they shall become

instead of being a simple escape for Ransom, serves as both a broadside against ignoring injustice and the uses of propaganda in representative republics like England as well as an accusation that, for a person of Ransom's stature, an "abnegation of the will" could not be achieved in such a society as 1930s England. The "will" requiring abnegation is the desire to exact easy solutions and to be the sole remedy to society's ills.⁵⁴ In short, the will to be "abnegated" is the *coercive*, non-collaborating will: the idea that one knows best and need not confer with others. Were Ransom to return to England, where "most men long to be delivered from the terror of thinking and feeling for themselves" (327), and "think of democracy [as] social atomism" (Auden 2002: 29), this coercive will could never be abnegated. It is this danger of returning to England, coupled with Ransom's inability to expurgate this coercive will without going through "the [tedious] path that leads us to perfection...[and] the process of self surrender" (328) at the monastery, that proves difficult for Ransom. To remain at the monastery not only entails asceticism, loss of position in English society, and the relinquishing of his chosen profession – it also would require Ransom to yoke himself inextricably to alterity since Ransom's "process of self surrender" would occur in a foreign land and amongst a colonized people to whose long-term subjugation his expedition contributed.⁵⁵

The text, then, provides only two alternatives: the Abbot's way and Ransom's way. The question spectators must pose is whether these are the only two alternatives possible or if there can exist other

good" (Auden 1996: 464). Less coercive and authoritarian styles of governments were failing in the 1930s because they "spoke of freedom but ignored justice, [and] its results have been social inequality, class war, lack of social conscience, lack of social cohesion, lack of sociality" (464).

⁵⁴ In this respect, the Abbot can be seen as arguing against the "consensus" that is nothing more than "the suppression of this division...the division of different forms of morality and of rights, the division between ways of opposing right to fact" (Rancière 2010: 188). The Abbot may, then, not only be drawing attention to the need to respond to alterity but also the need for "dissensus," which is "a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (140). Dissensus challenges the hierarchy of political agreements

⁵⁵ For Ransom, then, the call to respond attentively to alterity also possesses political, economic, and social ramifications – the alterity he will respond to is a being excluded from the political process, a being marginalized by the dominant socioeconomic structures of the day, and a being whose inclusion in political and economic circles would in turn have wide-ranging effects of how one thinks of numerous social institutions and practices. I am not suggesting that Auden sees the Abbot's way and Ransom's way as the only two alternatives. What Auden seems to state is that the sociopolitical and colonial structures and Ransom's complicity thus far with those structures have largely foreclosed other options.

ways. In some respects, one can read Ransom's failure as a failure to both respond to the Abbot's ethical call as well as a failure to respond adequately to the situation *as a whole* given his inability to construct new responses. The two options are complicity with the status quo or absolute withdrawal from the world; one could read these stark, delimiting choices as demonstrating the paucity of options for 1930s spectators interested in leadership. How could one lead effectively if these are the only two choices or if these *seem* the only two choices that one's historical moment provides? Is one to be a collaborator with the status quo or is one to simply exit, and by said exiting, challenge the status quo? Given the interest in involvement had for the playwrights in this study, perhaps what Auden and Isherwood are doing is tacitly prompting the audience to consider other modes of leadership and other modes of collaboration. Auden and Isherwood suggest the qualities a good leader must possess, implying that a good leader cannot be egoistic but must be collaborative and responsive, but leave it to the audience to determine what manners of being and behaviors this leader must exhibit.⁵⁶ The following pages demonstrate what an acceptance of the Abbot's call would entail for Ransom; the question of what sorts of third alternatives exist Auden and Isherwood do not pose. After all, were Auden and Isherwood to pose this question, what sort of substantive collaborative and intervening work would remain for the audience to do?

Ransom, then, quickly grasps the *cost* of the Abbot's invitation but he does not quite apprehend its potential *benefit*. Ransom does not understand that, after an encounter with alterity, "Being is no longer produced at one blow....therefore [there is] no continuity in being" (Levinas 1969: 284).⁵⁷ He does not consider the ways that alterity disrupts being and thus allows for new ways of being. The outcome of a faithful response to this call for ethical responsibility is a process that potentially refashions one's

⁵⁶ In many respects, this anticipates the work of John Arden, particularly *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*. See my reading of this play in the fourth chapter for possible correspondences between Arden and Auden and Isherwood's dramaturgy.

⁵⁷ Levinas oftentimes conflated being with essence (cf. *Otherwise than Being*); what this quote demonstrates is how one's essence is no longer stable after an encounter with alterity, an encounter that demands a response and responsibility. The continuity of one's essence has been disrupted and reshaped by this encounter, thus allowing for a new sort of subjectivity to occur, one constituted by and responsive to alterity.

subjectivity.⁵⁸ To respond in good faith to one's election is to grant oneself the opportunity to undergo a process of remaking oneself.⁵⁹ It is this opportunity to remake himself that Ransom misses by refusing to heed the Abbot's words. The call of the Abbot for Ransom to remain in the monastery and forego his expedition would indeed be both "a privilege and a subordination...because no one can be substituted for the I to measure the extent of its responsibilities" (Levinas 1969: 279). Accepting the call of the Abbot would allow Ransom not only to respond ethically to alterity, but affirm his own singular process of ethical subjectivization as well.⁶⁰

The Ascent of F6 tacitly illustrates how a revised notion of subjectivity could have paid important political and social dividends. By refusing election, then, Ransom not only refuses a new sense of subjectivity; he refuses to allow the ethical situation to come to fullness, interrupt the everyday, and bring about a crisis in the sociopolitical *status quo*. As Rudi Visker argues in *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference after Levinas and Heidegger* (2004), "One can only refuse the call after one has already received it. This refusal -- irresponsibility -- is a reaction to a responsibility that one *cannot* avoid.... not taking up the call -- is choosing for evil. That choice is possible, but it is 'incapable' of annulling responsibility" (127).⁶¹ While dubbing Ransom evil might seem far-fetched given his vow to never act out of "prestige, tactics, money and the privately pre-arranged meaning of familiar words," it can easily be argued that Ransom does attempt to annul his responsibility.⁶² He refuses to consider fully the implications of "mak[ing] the

⁵⁸As Levinas says in the opening sections of *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974), his follow-up to *Totality & Infinity*, one is "turned inside out, 'like a cloak'" (48), given that this remaking of one's subjectivity is a process of "finding oneself while losing oneself" (11).

⁵⁹ See "Substitution," the penultimate chapter of *Otherwise than Being* regarding this process of ethical subjectivization and how it occurs (99-129). In short, Levinas states that "Substitution [of the other for the I] frees the subject from ennui...from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself" (124).

⁶⁰ This is because election affirms "the uniqueness of he who does not allow himself to be replaced" (Levinas 1998: 168). Election allows for the creation of a unique ethical being, one open to and constituted by responsiveness.

⁶¹ Levinas provides a fluid definition of evil, arguing that it entails not only acts of violence or volitional harm against others but also is "the very egoism of the ego [*l'egoïsm meme du Moi*] that posits itself as its own origin, an uncreated, sovereign principle" (Levinas 1998: 138).

⁶² What Levinas does not quite explore for is whether one can make a choice *for* evil without being evil *per se*; it is likely that Levinas's viewing ethical responsibility through the lens of the Holocaust accounts for this not being explored in full.

complete abnegation of the will." Given the political changes afoot at the time of Auden and Isherwood's writing *The Ascent of F6* as well as Auden's own political writings, Ransom's attempts to annul his own responsibility represents nothing short of an utter ethical failure.⁶³ The effects of responding faithfully to the Abbot's call would not only be personally beneficial for Ransom, they would, given the media attention and political value of his expedition, raise pressing questions about imperialism, the political system that commissioned and funded the expedition, and the role of media in society.

The transformative potential of Ransom's accepting the call to ethical responsibility never finds its way to the stage because Ransom, at a time of "crisis, things going wrong" looks to the *past* instead of interrogating the moment he has just experienced. The Abbot, shortly before leaving Ransom's quarters, tells him to "not make up your mind at once. Think my proposal over" (328). Ransom immediately begins to reflect, stating that there "was a choice once, in the Lakeland Inn. I made it wrong; and if I choose again now, I must choose for myself alone, not for these others" (329). Ransom remains centered on "duties [that] rest on previous acts of my own" (Ross 1930: 21).⁶⁴ In short, he considers transitioning from his original adherence to past commitments to attempting to rectify the ills brought about by them. Nonetheless, his attempt at rectifying these ills remains an act of the coercive will, the will who can achieve it alone, who knows best, and who needs no outside aid or counsel.

His attempt to "choose for myself alone," however, comes to be seen as utterly impossible. Ransom recognizes the need for reparation, having made the "wrong" choice, but his course of action

⁶³ Ransom thus resembles Dante's Ulysses (cf. Canto XXVI of *Inferno*) who persuaded his men to follow him across the sea and then failed to care for them and ensure their safety. See n53.

⁶⁴ While it seems that Ransom tacitly transitions to a duty of "self improvement" focusing on "improving our own condition in respect of virtue or intelligence" (1930: 21), it should be remembered that Ross marshals the duty of self improvement along with the duties of justice and beneficence to create a compound *prima facie* duty to "produce as much good as possible" (1930: 27). Ransom seems to want to climb the mountain to combat "the destructive element of our will, for all we do is evil" (329), not to produce the maximum amount of good. It must also be remembered that Ross argues that "pleasure is not *prima facie* good" and that for something to be "good" it must also be "bonific," good for someone else aside from oneself (1930: 36). How, then, could Ransom's act be "self-improv[ing]"? It cannot, per Ross, be said to fit the majority of criteria for a self-improving act and must instead be seen as reparative one.

remains indeterminate. While recognizing that he needs to escape “from the destructive element of [his] will” (329), Ransom continues to vacillate on *how* this escape will occur. He has not given up the expedition, although he considers not only the ascent of F6 but

...the descent, too: the descent that goes down and down into the place where Stagmantle and my Brother and all their gang are waiting....the crowds in the streets down there, and the loud-speakers and the posing and the photographing and the hack-written articles you’ll be paid thousands to sign....the smell of the ceremonial banquets (329).

Ransom speaks with his fellow mountaineers, hoping that they are not all “corrupt” or “Stagmantle’s latest convert[s]” (330) and can provide him with a sufficient reason to climb the mountain. They all fail: Gunn’s simplistic retort “It’s got a top, hasn’t it” (329) fails to sway Ransom because “F6 is not like any mountain you have ever climbed” (329); Lamp’s statement that “We’ve got to beat Blavek [the leader of the rival Ostnian expedition]!” (330) and Williams’s interjection that “this [expedition] makes me feel twenty years younger already!” (330) both remain unconvincing; Shawcross’s reminder that “The people in England expect us to get to the top before the Ostnians. They believe in us. Are we going to let them down?” (330) merely reminds Ransom of the wrongness of his initial acceptance of the commission. Ransom, despite his disagreements and the insufficiency of his fellow mountaineers’ reasons, states, “Very well then, since you wish it. I obey you. The summit will be reached, the Ostnians defeated, the Empire saved. And I have failed. We start at dawn....” (331). The resigned manner in which he states this decision to continue the expedition and refuse the Abbot’s offer is reminiscent of the resignation with which he *accepted* the commission at his mother’s behest. Ransom, who moments prior had promised to “choose for myself alone,” should he “choose again now,” chooses to affirm his original choice despite being fully aware of its wrongness and despite wishing to make reparations for it. By refusing election, Ransom forecloses any possibility of “choos[ing] for myself alone, [and] not for these others” (329);

instead, he only remains able to “obey” the wishes of others (330). He comes to see himself, then, as little more than an instrument governed by the will of others.

Ransom, in short, cannot rectify his initial decision; by refusing election, Ransom has barred himself from the one way out given to him in the text. This is so because election extracts a subject from the comfortable obligations and the familiar, standard duties to which one adheres, presenting instead a sort of obligation that “calls for a unique response not inscribed in universal thought” (Levinas 1974: 145).⁶⁵ Ransom knows that the Abbot’s invitation, like election, “traverse[d] the concept of the ego to summon [him]” (1974: 145); his sense of self, then, is indelibly marked by election. Ransom’s existing sense of self is marked both by this election and the call for responsibility that it contains as well as by the knowledge that his existing sense of self will always prove insufficient for the challenges ahead of him.

While *The Ascent of F6* (1936) examines the *cost* of ethical failure as well as the impoverished ethical frameworks available to Auden and Isherwood in the interwar years, it also provides a challenge to spectators. This sobering account of failure corresponds to Auden’s comments in “Selling the Group Theatre” (1936) that “much is learned from failure” (486); what to learn from this failure, then, can be seen as the challenge spectators are to address. Auden and Isherwood show how the trusted and familiar means, models, and frameworks that seemed to have worked so well for past sociopolitical and ethical quandaries remain woefully inadequate for these new challenges of the late interwar era whilst also showing the need for new models of leadership to be devised, models that challenge both isolationism and corporatism.

Understanding this failure and accepting the challenge to work together and devise new ways of thinking, feeling, and leading then, should be seen as the point of *The Ascent of F6*. The fact that it never “resolve[s] the play’s political and ethical issues” (Mendelson 1981: 254) does not make it a debit to Auden and Isherwood’s account. Instead, this irresolution might not only be their greatest credit but the

⁶⁵ In *Otherwise than Being* (1974), Levinas states that election “extracts me from the concept in which I continually take refuge, for I find in it the measure of an obligation which is not defined in the election” (145).

very *raison d'être* of the drama. This irresolution proves so integral to the plot because it corresponds also to the staging of *The Ascent of F6*. The tripartite division of the stage not only creates the need for an attentiveness in the audience similar to that advocated by Yeats, it serves another function as well. By placing the lower middle-class characters in one stage box, media outlets in the other, and the main characters on the main stage, Auden and Isherwood draw the audience's attention to the manner that interwar society remains predicated on both manipulation and isolation. Furthermore, Auden and Isherwood demonstrate two things: (a) what happens when one is not attentive to these divisions and (b) to the means by which these divisions work to diminish, if not stifle, the "presupposition of equality" so integral to emancipatory politics. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the revelatory and transformative potential the simple act of paying attention has for Auden and Isherwood.

Paying Attention

One rarely hears the word *attention* without also hearing the word *paying* alongside it. This simply illustrates the strength of our associating attentiveness with either a cost or an obligation of some sort. The very phrase itself is wrapped up with associations of giving to the object of attention what is due or settling an account.⁶⁶ Rarely, however, does the cost of *inattention* receive notice. While attention carries with it a cost, the benefit of paying that cost is almost always clear: a settling of accounts or a showing of due regard to another person, place, or thing.⁶⁷ What, then, is the cost of inattention? Along with the question of how and why action is influenced by those who observe it, *that* is the question that

⁶⁶ Although related to the "acute awareness" I mentioned earlier in the chapter, the attentiveness elicited by the tripartite staging of *The Ascent of F6* differs somewhat from it. The movement from indifference to a "state of acute awareness" denotes more how an audience is emotionally and intellectually affected by a performance. The attentiveness here denotes more an attention given to one's own historical moment and the sociopolitical forces that shape that moment. Awareness and attention, while related, differ; the former denotes the level or extent to which I am cognizant of something, the latter denotes how I direct my mind and senses to a stimulus.

⁶⁷ Granted, one can always pay attention injudiciously, but for all intents and purposes, I would venture grouping injudiciously paid attention with inattention since the final result – not paying attention to what merits attention – remains, by and large, the same for both.

the tripartite staging of *The Ascent of F6* addresses. Since Auden and Isherwood liken attentiveness to an “endless revolving around the truth” and a general commitment by the attentive to “find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others,” the cost of inattentiveness is quite clear (Rancière 1991: 72). To be inattentive prevents the “presupposition [of equality]” so integral to Auden and Isherwood’s dramaturgy to function because this “presumption” is “a principle that only functions when put into action” (Rancière 2006: 52).⁶⁸ What this presupposition of equality enables is an understanding of and a way of challenging the means by which the *status quo* works to stifle any real political, social, economic, or ethical change.⁶⁹

The different sections of the stage in *The Ascent of F6* clash with one another or respond to one another, requiring audience members to attend to the dramatic action in ways similar to the way they observed Yeats’s *At the Hawk’s Well*. In the right-hand stage box sit Mr. and Mrs. A, two representatives of the English lower middle-class, and in the left-hand stage box is a “radio ANNOUNCER” whose broadcasts are heard and commented upon by Mr. and Mrs. A (304).

Mr. and Mrs. A do more, however, than offer commentary on the actions of Ransom and the proclamations and news that comes from the opposite stage box: they also exemplify what an audience should *not* be if it is to be ethically responsive. In short, they refuse to pay the cost of ethical attentiveness. If *The Dance of Death* shows the power of audiences who collaborate, then Mr. and Mrs. A of *The Ascent of*

⁶⁸ Rancière discusses the relation between attentiveness and emancipatory equality in the “Attentive Animal” section of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Stanford UP, 1991): 50-54.

⁶⁹ While at first glance it might seem odd to link Levinas with Rancière, I see them both as being interested in upending hierarchical relations of $\alpha > \beta$, where one party dominates another or has the potential to do so. Both are committed to finding ways of connecting α and β in more affectively powerful ways, ways that can allow for possible social change and the rise of new sorts of social formations. Levinas sees alterity itself as a presupposition of equality, as “the poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal....equality is [thus] founded” (*T&I* 213-214), going on in *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (1998) to state: “we must have comparison and equality: equality between those who cannot be compared” (82). Alterity disrupts one’s stable subjectivity in the same manner that dissensual activity cuts across the political consensus; for each, this cutting across opens up the potential for new subject positions. The key difference is that Rancière focuses primarily on political subjectivization whereas Levinas focuses on fostering ethically aware subjects. As Rancière states in “Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization” (1992): “the politics of emancipation is the politics of the self as an other, or, in Greek terms, a *heteron*. The logic of emancipation is a heterology” (59). Despite this difference, they share a strong formal similarity in how subjects are formed (an imposition of difference that presupposes equality); it is because of this formal similarity that I yoke them together.

F6 illustrate the stultifying stasis that results when audiences are not allowed to collaborate or refuse the opportunity to collaborate with the actors they observe. The remainder of this chapter will focus on two things: (1) how Mr. and Mrs. A never quite exhibit the attentiveness upon which a “presupposition of equality” is predicated and (2) how the news and stories given by the Announcer work to prevent any presupposition of equality that the couple may exhibit. In short, while the staging prompts audience members to pay attention in new ways, the dramatic action itself illustrates the costs of inattention.

What is so striking, and, perhaps, troubling, about Mr. and Mrs. A is their inability to assert or exhibit substantively any political or social agency. Mr. A, in his opening conversation with Mrs. A, states:

No, nothing that matters will ever happen;

Nothing you’d want to put in a book;

Nothing to tell to impress your friends—

The old old story that never ends:

I’m sick of the news. All you can hear

Is politics, politics everywhere:

Talk in Westminster, talk at Geneva, talk in the lobbies and talk on the throne;

Talk about treaties, talk about honour, mad dogs quarrelling over a bone.

What have they ever done, I ask you? What are they ever likely to do

To make life easier, make life happier? What have they done for me or for you? (297-298).

This conversation soon closes with Mrs. A stating “Give us something to live for. We have waited too long” (299). While one could read the comments of Mr. A and Mrs. A as simple malaise at their life situation: a dead-end job, an uneventful life, and a crushingly boring routine, doing so does not adequately address the political distance they feel as well as the affective distance they feel from their peers and leaders.

Mr. and Mrs. A see themselves as being of no account both personally and politically and as a result never quite hold themselves to account. The first words of Mr. A are a question, asking, "Has anything happened?" to which his wife quickly replies, "What should happen?" (297). The hope of something having happened is met by an implicit statement that such hopes are misplaced, if not foolish; Mrs. A responds not with *could* but with *should*, making it less a matter of conditionality than a matter of expected behavior.⁷⁰ She expects nothing to happen; had something happened, it would have been somewhat inappropriate. Both soon agree that "nothing that matters will ever happen" in their lives despite their lingering hopes otherwise. In terms of politics, they feel that the government has done nothing that directly benefits them despite the talk of "politics, politics everywhere." The political climate is one of abstraction (the "talk[ing] about honour"), and one of matters far beyond their workaday lives (foreign treaties, lobbyists, and the Crown). At the same time, however, they feel distanced from the body politic yet crave something "to bring a smile to the face" and "make us proud of our race" (298).⁷¹ They see the abstraction for what it is, as evidenced by their statement: "When will they help us? When there's a war/ Then they will ask for our children and kill them; sympathise deeply and ask for some more" (298). Despite this discernment, they do not act upon their insight because they do not know how. They feel isolated and distant from the political process as they do from both their peers and leaders. They see no way of bridging this distance or working to change the sociopolitical landscape; all they have is wishful thinking, the dream to experience "Moments of happiness [that] do not come often" (317). While this is a legitimate, sympathetic desire, it remains a passive one that sees all power as external to their lives and work. As their response to Ransom's decision to accept the commission illustrates, this wishful thinking culminates in their hoping for someone greater than themselves to redeem them, to make them

⁷⁰ While *should*, a modal verb like *could*, can be used as a replacement for the present subjunctive or as a replacement of *would* in its conditional form in some varieties of English, the tone of their dialogue implies less a matter of conditionality and more a matter of expected or recommended behavior.

⁷¹ It is interesting that Mrs. A views the English people as constituting a "race" of their own. While race was often used interchangeably with nationality at the time, Auden and Isherwood explore the links between nationalism and racial identity further in *On the Frontier* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin*.

whole, to give their life meaning.⁷² Few things run more counter to a “presupposition of equality” than the belief and trust in another human being who is far superior to yourself to solve your problems.⁷³ The question remains, though, as to what forestalls their moving towards a “presupposition of equality”? Although they see the inklings of a societal wrong, namely their having no substantive say in the political process, they remain mired in a world where “nothing that matters will ever happen.” Seeing this desire for wanting “something to live for” as simple escapism misses the point; instead, it indicates their presumed inability to address the deep-rooted wrongs present in their society.⁷⁴ The matter seems to be less about escapism and more about an awareness of one’s capability to exert some agency, however limited it may be. While it seems obvious that they are escapist, Mr. and Mrs. A fail to assert their equality not because they attend more to the “form of life-avoidance that may attract [them]...the longing for ease” (Callan 1979: 332). Instead, one could more plausibly argue that next to nothing in their lives points them towards emancipation.

Mr. and Mrs. A have practically no way of seeing what emancipation actually *is* or what could even constitute a “presumption of equality.” This, more so than their critique of the unsuitability of contemporaneous ethical frameworks, is Auden and Isherwood at their most damning. Not only do the interwar years lack an ethical framework capable of addressing the issues society faces, there is next to nothing in the sociopolitical framework that even points one towards “the denial of an identity given by

⁷² In many respects, their wanting to be *given* “something to be thankful for” corresponds to the wish for a redeemer expressed by the “VOICES [that] *are heard from the darkened STAGE-BOXES*” (324) that Ransom hears whilst gazing into the crystal to see his future. These voices request that Ransom: “Make me just/ Cool my lust/ Make us kind/ Make us of one mind/ Make us brave” (325). Little wonder, then, that Ransom sees himself as a *de-facto* redeemer of men.

⁷³ This also runs counter to Rancière’s idea of the equality of intelligences in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991); see particularly 45-73, “Reason Between Equals.”

⁷⁴ Rancière, in *Dis-agreement* (1999) sees the recognition of wrong (*le tort*) as being a “singular universal, a polemical universal” because it ties “the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society” (39). Recognizing a wrong and addressing it begin the process of political subjectivization; before a wrong is recognized, before one realizes that she is excluded from society, she has “no existence as a real part of society” (39). Stating this wrong “is simply the mode of subjectification in which the assertion of equality takes its political shape” (39). For a detailed reading of Rancière’s formulation of “wrong,” see 21-42 of *Dis-agreement* as well as “Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization” in *October* 61 (Summer 1992): 58-64.

an other, given by the ruling order of policy" (Ranci re 1992: 62).⁷⁵ Mr. and Mrs. A are indeed *unhappy* with their place in society and with the identity imposed upon them by the dominant "policy," but unhappiness is not the same as active, contentious "denial."

A large barrier to this active exercise of political denial lies in the work of the Announcer and others who speak from the left-hand stage box opposite Mr. and Mrs. A. The Announcer, rarely acting as anything more than a propagandist for the interests of James Ransom, Stagmantle, Dellaby-Couch, and Welwyn, appeals to listeners in a manner that invites them to consider themselves fully invested, fully benefitting members of the dominant sociopolitical and economic regimes. When the Announcer first speaks, both stage-boxes are "*illuminated. In the right BOX, MR. A sits listening to the radio ANNOUNCER, who speaks from BOX on the left*" (304). The divided stage not only requires the audience to split its attention, it implicitly posits the Announcer and Mr. A as being in myriad relationships: actor-spectator, moderator-respondent, instructor-pupil, speaker-listener, informed-uninformed, and fellow citizen to fellow citizen. A great deal of the Announcer's rhetoric builds off of appeals to these implied, albeit tenuous or patently false, connections. The Announcer, acting in many respects as a propagandist, appeals to listeners like the A family in a variety of ways. He addresses them first as consumers: "If you drink coffee for breakfast, you will be familiar with Sudoland as the name of one of the most delicious brands in the world" (304); as interested pupils: "But, unless you have a brother or nephew there, I don't expect you know much more about this beautiful and exciting country. It is about as big as Ireland and embraces a wide variety of scenery and climate" (304); as avid sportsmen: "I do not think it likely that it will be long before our young climbers will discover a new ground for their sport, offering more magnificent opportunities for their skill and their love of nature" (304-305); as part of the colonial venture to *improve* Sudoland: "Most of [the villagers] are employed on the coffee estates, where they make excellent workmen....Hospitals,

⁷⁵ This springs perhaps from the fact that the "anthropological turn" of the late interwar years focused on "a second-order universalism based on English cultural integrity....[that] turns on the representative status of a bounded culture" (Esty 2004: 14). Given the power, scope, and appeal of this "bounded culture," opportunities for assertion and denial remain few and far between.

clinics and schools have done much to raise the standard of personal hygiene and education" (304); and as politically engaged listeners: "You may have read recently, in some of the papers, of riots in Sudoland, but from personal experience I can tell you that these stories have been grossly exaggerated. They were confined to a very small section of irresponsibles egged on by foreign agitators...the vast majority [of Sudoese] are happy and contented" (304). The Announcer positions himself as a credible source speaking "from personal experience" and with vast knowledge about Sudoese customs, climate, diet, landscape, and temperament. The Announcer also promotes himself, however, as being just like his listeners: he wants to retire one day, he wants to travel, he appreciates "famous views" and natural beauty (304), he is interested—albeit not too interested for that would be unseemly—in other, more exotic cultures, he enjoys sports, he benefits from colonial ventures just like they do, he finds the geniality of the colonial work comforting, as they should, and he dismisses colonial unrest as irresponsible, as, again, they should. Nothing he says – and he is the sole source of news and only connection to the world beyond Britain that Mr. and Mrs. A possess – points towards anything emancipatory.

The manner that the expedition is promoted all but creates a consensus, a little totality that connects everyone and at the same time seemingly grants everyone a stake in the expedition. The expedition allows for a more coherent notion of what binds English culture and values together. Mr. and Mrs. A see Ransom, his fellow mountaineers, and the expedition in general as representing something archetypally English: "their courage is something the least can understand" (316). The expedition joins people together and makes them "so proud that [they] belonged to the same country and the same race as these gallant men" (316). As Stagmantle, speaking from the left stage-box, states: "From such pioneers, the man in the street may learn to play his part in the great game of life, small though it may be, with a keener zest and daring" (315).⁷⁶ This mention of role-playing mentioned by Stagmantle merits further

⁷⁶ The term "great game" is a term redolent of colonial enterprises and of literary works depicting said enterprises, most notably Kipling's *Kim* (1901). Auden and Isherwood's antipathy towards colonial ventures, espionage, and conflicts is at the center of many of their collaborations, from *The Ascent of F6* to *Journey to a War* (1939).

attention. The “man in the street” is not simply a beneficiary of the existing sociopolitical and economic framework; instead, he is a necessary part of it, a collaborator whose part can be played “with a keener zest and daring.” Every kind of media that Mr. and Mrs. A encounter presents them as being *vital parts* of this framework, not simply indirect beneficiaries. As Claire Warden states in *British Avant-Garde Theatre* (2012), “*The Ascent of F6*...attempts to negotiate this tension [between truth and fiction], enabling the audience to question the intentions of the media and popular legend and the interested parties that exploit them” (31).

As the following chapter on T. S. Eliot details, modernist drama continually explores the many sides of collaboration – one can be a collaborator who works to transform the *status quo* or one can collaborate with those who wish to further the *status quo*. Mr. and Mrs. A, unlike the audience, never obtain the distance necessary to see, much less address, their exploitation and thus remain unwitting contributors to the *status quo*. Even their dreams and wishful thinking revolve around them having the resources and money of Lady Welwyn, Lord Stagmantle, and Sir James Ransom; they lack the awareness that might allow them to *dream* of resisting the dominant political system, much less the *knowledge* of how to actually do so. Their moments of despair towards the play’s end are due *not* to the fact that a call for equal standing has been ignored but to the reality that social standing of Ransom, Stagmantle, and Welwyn will forever elude them:

The embossed card of invitation is not for us;

No photographers lurk at our door;

The house-party and the grouse-moore we know by hearsay only

We know of all these from the lending library and the super cinema (343).

The only response they know is to “Turn on the wireless. Tune in to another station;/ To the tricks of variety or the rhythm of jazz” (343). While one could criticize the A family for embracing distraction, my retort would be whether anything has made them aware of their own agency?

The Ascent of F6 addresses this question not by castigating the As for embracing distraction or never mustering up the gumption to make a “presumption of equality.” Auden and Isherwood, instead, show how the regimes of discourse present in their society leave Mr. and Mrs. A precious little room or direction on how to begin to presume that they are equal to their social superiors and leaders.⁷⁷ *The Ascent of F6* not only illustrates what happens to societies and individuals when the frameworks they have used to understand the world in which they live become inadequate, it also demonstrates what happens when individuals lack the opportunity to become meaningful collaborators in the communities and societies of which they are a part. *The Ascent of F6* remains, as its subtitle states, *A Tragedy in Two Acts*, because this inadequacy goes unrecognized or becomes exploited by those seeking profit or power. This study has argued previously that much of the innovative staging in these dramas centers on a desire to create new ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking. *The Ascent of F6* highlights the effects of *not* developing these new ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking. Absent these new modes of attention and feeling, there is no hope of producing a new way of *being* politically or ethically. One cannot expect a new sort of political or ethical subject capable of addressing the issues her society faces to arise in such a climate. Auden and Isherwood argue that for people to fashion new ways of *being* politically or ethically, the society of which they are a part must also have avenues that permit, elicit, and foster active, transformative collaboration.

⁷⁷ One, after all, has to be taught or shown how to collaborate effectively. As Auden’s *The Dance of Death* shows, one must have cues and places that allow for and are designed to elicit collaboration. Just as an audience would not know how a production needs it to collaborate unless that production gave it hints, cues, and tips, one cannot expect the As to simply know how to contribute and collaborate. The very fact that the *audience* is seen as a part of a troupe who presumably trains together, knows one another’s strengths and weaknesses, can anticipate one another’s movements, has built up cues, etc. seems to prove this point; for one to collaborate effectively, one must be part of a troupe. Societies, Auden and Isherwood seem to be arguing, must better fashion themselves in ways that invite, allow for, and help individuals contribute.

III. Concluding Remarks

Despite their differences, *The Dance of Death* and *The Ascent of F6* both require productions where the “author, actor, producer and audience are joined as partners” (Dukes 1924: 682).⁷⁸ *The Dance of Death* employs direct address and audience involvement in the performance and demonstrates this partnership in very vivid ways, with certain parts of the performance *requiring* audience interaction in order for the performance to continue. *The Ascent of F6*, whilst lacking the dramaturgical panache of *The Dance of Death*, also demonstrates this partnership because those who “are seeing and hearing [the performance] are also co-operating” (*Plays* 491). *The Ascent of F6* illustrates how sociopolitical forces can impede one’s ability to be a “seeing,” “hearing,” contributing, or leading member of society.⁷⁹

Both of these plays remain relevant because they pose questions that audiences, actors, producers, and authors continue to ask even today. Auden and Isherwood’s commitment to making “every member of the audience...feel like an understudy” as opposed to being simply “a passenger” (*Plays* 497, 491) bears no small relation to contemporary theatre’s interest in capturing and communicating “the magic we feel from communal participation in the make-believe of the spirit” (Vogel 2004: 5), providing an avenue for people simply to “talk to each other and hopefully get in a civic dialogue” (Vogel 2012: 137), and to realize the political power of what theatre does so well: “organiz[ing] people to come to one room...[given that] what starts every grass-roots movement...[is] people organizing in one room” (Ruhl 2010: xii). These plays, simply put, remind readers and spectators of their own agency.

The link between theatre (*θεῖατρον*) and theory (*θεωρία*), given their shared root, *θεῖα*, to see, is well-known by this point; beyond this, though, Auden and Isherwood remind us how spectatorship

⁷⁸ See n6 regarding partnership. It is important to remember that one of the partners can have a more dominant, leader-like role. Partnership is not the same as an equal, 50-50 partnership.

⁷⁹ It does, however, illustrate how one can be a collaborator who “sells out” and aligns himself with sociopolitical forces keen on maintaining the *status quo*. The ability to be a collaborator, contributor, and fellow builder of one’s own society is what is frustrated in the play.

(θεατήρας) should always be considered alongside theatre and theory. To be a spectator, then, is to always already be both a theorist and a practitioner in the theatre.⁸⁰ To be a spectator is to be not only one who sees the performance but also one who responds to and works with the performance.

The desire to have “every member of the audience...feel like an understudy” may have less to do, then, with creating an affective and intellectual “state of acute awareness” amongst spectators and more to do with preparing them for acting differently in the future (*Plays* 459). Understudying for a part, after all, always carries with it the potential for future acting. One understudies so as to be able to contribute to, as opposed to mar, a performance. Also, one understudies with the expectation that he will likely have to perform and will have to do so well when the opportunity finally comes. Furthermore, understudies are usually ensemble members who have a minor role in the performance but can cover a larger role if called upon to do so.⁸¹ Understudies, like the audience, are an active part of the “troupe” (*Plays* 491).

Auden and Isherwood, by creating performances that require understudying spectators, also fashion spectators capable of future action in the world beyond the theatre. Spectators who understudy have developed ideas, theories, and practices regarding how they will play their part. The part spectators must play, though, extends beyond the theatre. Spectators who engage with performances built around the notion that it is better “not to dictate, but to contribute; not to impose, but to collaborate” learn, Auden and Isherwood argue, how to better collaborate with individuals to form more equitable communities (Dukes 1924: 685). Auden and Isherwood, to their credit, do not provide easy answers or

⁸⁰ Strangely enough, the links between theorizing and spectatorship have received little attention, except by Rancière, who focuses more on visual art and spectatorship. In comparison, the relationship between philosophy and authorship and philosophy and acting has received a great deal of recent critical attention; cf. the respective work of Martin Puchner and Freddie Rokem.

⁸¹ Understudies should not be confused with standbys or alternates who do not regularly appear in a given performance but are called upon to cover a role in case of emergency.

readymade recipes for successful collaboration; instead, their challenging dramas provide spectators with the opportunity to learn, experience, and experiment.⁸²

Auden described his own experimental theatre as a “feature of modern life” that is “as normal and useful a feature of modern life as an experimental laboratory” because “in its successes important avenues of development may be opened out, which would not otherwise have been noticed” (*Plays* 498). It is the opening out of these avenues and the making noticeable of their potential beyond the theatre with which this chapter has been concerned. Auden and Isherwood vividly demonstrate not only how audiences affect and shape performances but, in turn, how their “co-operating” in these performances affectively and intellectually prepares them to reshape the communities and societies to which they inevitably return once the house lights have darkened, the ticket stall closed, and the doors have been locked.

⁸² In this respect they echo Stark Young’s argument in *The Theatre* (1927) that effective theatre is not “only a thesis argument...or a social corrective, or a preaching vehicle, or a messenger service for personal opinion, or a museum of facts” (179).

3. The Theatre of Collaboration: *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral*

The recent trend in studies of T. S. Eliot's has been to see his dramas as "culturally elastic," as David Chinitz's *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2003) argues (6). Eliot, as these studies rightly show, constantly melds high culture with popular culture in plays such as *Sweeney Agonistes*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion*. This chapter, however, demonstrates how Eliot's dramas are collaboratively plastic because they constantly manufacture means for spectators to collaborate with the production while also encouraging the creation of more flexible and cautious forms of collaboration. *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral* blur the line between spectator and player while also placing the audience on equal footing with the production.¹ These dramas not only cast audience members in the performance; they invest them in the performance. This can be achieved by directly addressing the audience and casting them as jurors, as in *Murder in the Cathedral*, or by having actors sit with the spectators whilst not speaking, as did the Group Theatre production of *Sweeney Agonistes*. Eliot's dramas, then, contain both a casting call and a ceremony of investiture for spectators. Through either the ritualism of *Sweeney Agonistes* or the de facto swearing in of spectators as jurors in *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot provides spectators with multiple ways of attending *to* and various means of engaging *with* the production.²

¹ In this respect, Eliot's *Sweeney* and *Murder* – as is the case with all the dramas in my study – serve as performances that "challenge the opposition between viewing and acting" (Ranci re 2011: 13) by blurring the line between spectator and player. Eliot, while he differs from Auden and Isherwood's desire to make the audience part of the "troupe," nonetheless wishes to provide spectators with a more active role to play as well as press spectators to reflect on their own agency, inability to act, and complicity with the events being staged.

² Eliot's interest in ritual, while corresponding to Yeats, Auden, and Isherwood's interest in ritual, differs from their use of ritual in drama in subtle yet substantial ways. Whereas Yeats, Auden, and Isherwood saw ritual in drama as a means of creating a shared, communal experience capable of evoking powerful emotive bonds or inspiring political and social activism, Eliot saw ritual as proof that people already share a culture, religion, beliefs, or standards. Ritual

Ritual occupies a central place in these dramas because Eliot sees ritual as something shared by members of a community as well as something that can serve as the rhythm of a community. Eliot links these two concepts in his “The Beating of a Drum” (1923), which will be discussed in the following pages. For Eliot, this rhythm drives the formation of shared rituals, which in turn allows for the formation of communities and societies around these rituals. A community, Eliot suggests, is a group of people whose lives are lived in rhythm with one another, people who are “united by an ‘obligation’” (Esposito 2010, 6).³ This idea of community marks something neither normative nor exclusive. Rhythm entails a certain fluidity, being rooted in the Greek verb “to flow, run, or stream” (*ρην*); Eliot values rhythm because of this fluidity as well as because of rhythm’s mutability: rhythm is *not* monotonous sameness but a pattern of strong and weak notes, a pattern predicated on variation and capable of withstanding changes. Furthermore, rhythm occurs in time; one must be “in time” to either follow or hold a rhythm. Rhythm, then, denotes a being “in time” while also allowing for subtle variations to occur so long as they do not irreparably damage the overall rhythm.⁴ This being “in time” entails not merely carrying forth the rhythm but also denotes being fully aware of one’s own

for Eliot was not a momentary thing but a foundational thing upon which more stable, coherent societies could be built.

³ Community for Eliot entails not just a cultural community, a political community, or a social one; instead, *community* signifies the intersection of all of these things. Eliot, after all, laments the fragmentation and isolation he sees as the hallmark of modern, interwar life and is searching for something unifying. Community for Eliot represents both something restorative (that which can bind us together), challenging (we together define and remake community), and defensive (a community of consenting, different adults as a bulwark against fascism and authoritarianism). It is quite telling that his idea of community is one of obligations to alterity given that other ideas of community in the 1930s focused on race, nationality, shared heritage, and the like. One need only think of the Nazi idea of *volks-gemeinschaft* (“people’s community”) to understand the unicity of the sort of community Eliot espouses in *Sweeney and Murder*.

⁴ For Eliot, rhythm was the essence of verse; behind all the allusions, symbols, and leitmotifs, what remains is “something closer to the pure, self-sufficient stuff of poetry – something closer to the nature of music and musical structure” (1957, 29). Eliot, however, fears that “work[ing] too closely to musical analogies” could result in “artificiality” (32).

historical moment and the problems it faces. Rituals grow forth from this “timely” rhythm while also providing a means for people to communicate, respond to, and alter said rhythm; rhythm gives rituals meaning just as rituals allow rhythm its full expression. Collaboration, Eliot demonstrates, occurs when we engage these rituals and rhythms in new ways.

In addition to being collaboratively plastic, these dramas also show the plasticity of collaboration by the ways that they demonstrate the mutability of collaboration. Collaboration carries with it an ability to adapt to any given environment, accommodating whatever demands the performance space, spectators, or performers have. Unlike Auden and Isherwood’s dramas, Eliot’s dramas do not merely call out for collaboration; instead, they allude to the ever-presence of collaboration in certain types of drama. *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral* both illustrate the multiple ways one can both define and practice collaboration. While the text of *Sweeney Agonistes* discusses what prevents shared, communal experiences from occurring, the play is often staged in a fashion that resembles a communal experience: The Group Theatre production, the first full production in London of the play, turned “the audience itself into a kind of chorus ([as] the actors were sitting among us)” (McCarthy 80). McCarthy, reviewing the play for *The Listener*, also remarked on how spectators also “were sitting on the stage itself” (80), as there was no apron elevating the players above spectators. *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), which dramatizes the 1170 assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, takes a different tack by showing how spectators always serve as active participants who evaluate the merits, interpret the wider historical consequences, and explore the motives of characters’ on-stage actions. *Murder in the Cathedral* shows this by casting spectators in the position of jurors and by having characters directly address them and face them: the staging and positioning of

the characters mimic a defendant on the dock facing a panel of jurors. Spectators, then, not only must individually reflect on the actions they just saw, but must also arrive at a shared, unanimous decision through collaborative deliberation. Shared experiences such as these possess a privileged place in Eliot's dramaturgy of collaboration, as such experiences represent instances where people gather in the same space, bear witness to the same event, and communicate their very particular and often strikingly different impressions of said event.

Eliot's "The Beating of a Drum" (1923), an oft-overlooked yet important short essay, demonstrates how central such experiences were to his overall aesthetic sensibilities. While essays such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" (1923), and "Marie Lloyd" (1923) rightly occupy a central place in Eliot studies, this short essay has often escaped critical notice, excepting scholars interested in Eliot's views of primitivism and ritual.⁵ This chapter sees this short essay as central to Eliot's theatrical aesthetic. While much of "The Beating of a Drum" concerns itself with primitivism and ritual, the essay also illustrates the import of and need for shared, communal experiences. Eliot closes the essay with the following statement:

It is equally possible to assert that primitive man acted in a certain way and then found a reason for it. An unoccupied person, finding a drum, may be seized with a desire to beat it; but unless he is an imbecile he will be unable to continue beating it, and thereby satisfying a need (rather than a 'desire'), without finding a

⁵ Examples of this include Marc Manganaro's "Beating a Drum in a Jungle": T. S. Eliot on the Artist as 'Primitive'" (1986). There are a variety of other works that discuss Eliot, primitivism, and ritual, including Manganaro's *Myth, Rhetoric, and the Voice of Authority: A Critique of Frazier, Eliot, Frye, and Campbell* (Yale UP, 1992) and his "Dissociation in 'Dead Land': The Primitive Mind in the Early Poetry of T. S. Eliot" (1986) as well as Robert Crawford's *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Clarendon, 1987).

reason for so doing. The reason may be the long continual drought. The next generation or the next civilization will find a more plausible reason for beating a drum....We may have similar reasons, but we have lost the drum (12).

The seemingly innocuous usage of “we” in the final sentences is anything but; it indicates how the reasons behind meaningful rituals and practices that permeate, construct, and reshape people’s daily lives are the product of an entire “generation” or “civilization.” The drum serves as a way of establishing and communicating the rhythm that “we” as a community share. The tragedy of having lost this drum is that no means of communicating this rhythm exist; what is lacking is not only the rhythm or rituals but an *instrument* for making them heard. Eliot implies that we need to work together and find this drum or make a new one; Eliot sees this act of discovery or creation as a means of addressing the fragmentation and alienation endemic in interwar life. Eliot yokes his aesthetic sensibilities and artistic practice to collaboration, to the shared activity of people laboring together to discover or create. Both *Sweeney* and *Murder* dramatize both the vital necessity of this collaboration as well as the things that frustrate this collaboration. Collaboratively plastic dramas such as Eliot’s should therefore be seen as reflective of Eliot’s overall aesthetic sensibilities as well as illustrating the centrality of collaboration to his dramaturgy.⁶

This chapter examines in detail how Eliot’s two best-received interwar dramas, *Sweeney Agonistes* and *Murder in the Cathedral*, exhibit the collaborative plasticity described above. *Sweeney* and *Murder* were largely seen as significant theatre events, being a part of the local

⁶ Richard Badenhausen’s *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Oxford UP, 2005) explores the centrality of collaboration to Eliot’s aesthetic sensibilities; of particular use is his linking collaboration to artistic impersonality. My focus differs from Badenhausen in that I focus less on impersonality and more on the intersection of collaboration, community, ritual, and rhythm.

interwar avant-garde that challenged commercial (and largely realist) theatre. Both offered withering critiques of the interwar status quo whilst also pointing the way to this “drum” and new rhythms to play upon it. The fact that Eliot figures these attempts through collaboration simply illustrates the gravity, complexity, import, and potentiality he saw these new rhythms possessing – no single ear could hear them fully nor could one single hand keep time properly.⁷

I. Communal Collaboration, Common Failures

I found myself in an L-shaped room on the third floor, round which seats had been arranged leaving an empty space in the middle, where stood a table with some drinks on it and some unoccupied chairs. It was in this space that the performance took place. We, the spectators, were in the position of Elizabethan swells; we were sitting on the stage itself....it certainly had a grisly impressiveness lifted above the matter-of-fact, partly by the symbolic suggestion of the masks, and partly by Mr. Doone’s device of turning the audience itself into a kind of chorus (the actors were sitting among us.)
–Desmond McCarthy, “Sweeney Agonistes” (1935)

Were you at Sweeney last Sunday? ...Yeats was there, and Bert Brecht, the writer of the German ‘Beggar’s Opera’. Who was very impressed, said it was the best thing he had seen for a long time and by far the best thing in London
–Rupert Doone, letter to John Johnson (1934)

Bertolt Brecht, newly arrived in London and making the theatre rounds, gave a characteristically blunt summation of the London theatre scene in a short postcard to his wife:

“The theatres are antediluvian” (186). It is little surprise then, that The Group Theatre’s

December production of *Sweeney Agonistes* made such an impression on him. Aside from

⁷ Eliot speaks of a drum, which has a single player, but suggests the importance of a community who collaborates. Reconciling this single player with a collaborating community proves easy when one remembers that the drummer, by giving voice to shared rituals and rhythms, *serves* the community; equally, those hearing *respond* to this rhythm. It is a reciprocal process. Additionally, one could see the drummer –by communicating this rhythm and allowing for hearers to respond to it – as embodying the sort of leadership qualities that Auden and Isherwood seemingly espouse in their dramas (cf. Chapter II).

establishing contact with *The New Left Review*, seeing the *Sweeney Agonistes-Dance of Death* double bill was “the other significant event of this visit [to London]” (Smith 309).⁸ It was also significant for many other theatregoers who relished experimentation on the stage. As Robert Medley, the artistic director for and co-founder of the Group Theatre, recounts in his memoir, *Drawn from the Life* (1983), the performance of *Sweeney Agonistes* presented “the Group Theatre as a venture that had to be taken seriously: it was doing important things, and it was beginning to attract a lively and informed audience” (152). Michael Sayers, reviewing the play for *New English Weekly*, countered critics such as George W. Bishop and Ivor Brown who found the production pretentious, dull, and nonsensical, with his matter-of-fact praise of the production: “All I can say is that no one who professes...an intelligent interest in theatre can afford to miss the present productions....Here is theatre springing from the rhythms and idioms of your own life...with its slang and jazz heightened into poetry” (10 October 1935, vii, 435). These many reactions to the performance demonstrate the freedom audiences felt when presented with a collaboratively plastic drama like *Sweeney*. Eliot separated himself from “antediluvian” drama by engaging and challenging spectators through provocative, intimate staging coupled with rhythmic, powerful poetry.

This section argues that *Sweeney* was “the best thing in London” because of what it both *allowed from* and *requested of* its audiences. Its collaborative plasticity, then, lay in how it combined opportunity and expectation; it represented an opportunity for collaboration as well as obligation. As the next section illustrates in its discussion of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot

⁸ As James Smith states in “Brecht, the Berliner Ensemble, and the British Government” (*New Theatre Quarterly* 22.4, November 2006), Brecht established contact with *The Left Review* during this visit, which soon published the first English translation of his work; his seeing the Group Theatre production of *Sweeney Agonistes* was “the other significant event of this visit” (309).

often depicted the relationship between collaboration and obligation: how a request to work with can also be seen as an ethical call for responsibility of and to others. McCarthy's favorable review illustrates *how* this allowance and request occurred: "We, the spectators, were in the position of Elizabethan swells; we were sitting on the stage itself" (80).⁹ The seating and lack of spatial barriers, similar to the Cunard performance of *At the Hawk's Well*, propels the audience into the performance. In short, *Sweeney*, by having a role for audiences to play, "challenge[s] the opposition between viewing and acting" by placing the audience members in situations in which they both act and observe (Rancière 2011: 13).¹⁰

Since the audience was placed in an "L-shaped room...round which seats had been arranged leaving an empty space in the middle [for the performers]" (MacCarthy 1935: 80), there is no point where the Group Theatre audience would have seen *just* the performers. The audience would have always seen both the performers and itself; to look *at* the performance meant also to look *into* the audience. There is no point where one can solely be a passive observer; one is always a part of the spectacle and a spectator. As a result, the Group Theatre production can also be seen, much like the première of *At the Hawk's Well*, as attempting to engender a new sort of attentiveness amongst its spectators. As a result, one must either foster or forge new types of attentiveness to make meaning of and to engage with the production.

⁹ This bears no small resemblance to Abbey production of *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, further clarifying the degree of correspondence between the dramaturgy of Yeats's dance plays and the dramaturgy of poetic dramas that followed them. Eliot, however, differs from Yeats in that Yeats's subject matter (aside from *Dreaming of the Bones*) deals with the mythic and heroic past whereas *Sweeney* has a contemporary setting and focuses on sordid life. Rupert Doone's 1934-1935 production of *Sweeney Agonistes* also builds off of Auden's inclusion of audience members into the "troupe" that performed the play.

¹⁰ Granted, Rancière argues that spectatorship is inherently active; my argument uses Rancière's notion of the inherent activity as a starting point for postulating further forms of more overtly active spectatorship, namely spectators who are given a role to play or who intervene in the performance. I am less interested in a Rancièrian reading of Eliot and more interested in using Rancière as a starting point. For Rancière, observing and evaluating *is* acting; I am interested in the sorts of action and awareness that these evaluative actions can engender.

Being a spectator of *Sweeney Agonistes* would have required attentive plasticity just as much as collaborative plasticity.¹¹ At a very basic level, watching two loosely connected fragments would have required patterns of attentiveness different from those needed in a normative, more passive theatre experience.

A great deal of this new sort of attentiveness is generated by the manner in which *Sweeney* is written. The text of *Sweeney Agonistes* remains unfinished, consisting of two fragments entitled “Fragment of a Prologue” and “Fragment of an Agon,” meaning that the audience occupies an even more vital role when it is performed, as they are tasked with finding points of correspondence between the two fragments. The first fragment revolves around two prostitutes, Doris and Dusty, as they play tarot cards, avoid a phone call from Pereira, and entertain several johns: Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein, and Krumpacker. The second fragment centers on Sweeney himself, whose charismatic and brutal threats to “carry [Doris] off” and his claim that he “knew a man who once did a girl in” enrapture the men present and horrify Doris (CPP 79, 83).¹² The drama has very little in the way of plot – partly because of its fragmentary nature – and focuses more upon capturing the emotive and intellectual states of the characters. The remainder of this section focuses on what the drama’s fragmentary style and its focus on emotive and intellectual states provides for spectators.

The fragmentary nature of *Sweeney* and the numerous types of experiences it fuses together grant considerable license to spectators. This chapter, generally speaking, sees the

¹¹ By attentive plasticity I simply mean that *Sweeney* shows the mutability of attentiveness, how attentiveness means more than focusing on one set of events. *Sweeney*, in short, expands and challenges our notions of what we mean by attentiveness and paying attention. The sort of attentiveness Eliot required in *Sweeney* is reminiscent of the tripartite staging of *The Ascent of F6* and the divided stage of *On the Frontier*.

¹² I will refer to T. S. Eliot’s *The Complete Poetry and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) as *CPP*, followed by the corresponding page number throughout the remainder of this chapter.

“unfinished” nature of *Sweeney Agonistes* as being the very *source* of its novelty and import. *Sweeney* has been dubbed “an unfinished poem...[that] proved rather a dead end, related more nearly to parts of the later fragment *Coriolan*” (Schneider 1975: 95),¹³ considered the “most signal failure among Eliot’s attempts” (Smith 1960: 112) or dismissed as being “scarcely a play” (Sidnell 1984: 92). On the other hand, *Sweeney* has been claimed to be “no more a fragment than *The Waste Land*, which Eliot also named thus in its final lines: ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’” (Barker 1985: 103).¹⁴ This chapter takes a different tack, arguing that it should neither be considered a fragmentary failure nor be seen as a complete whole. Instead, this chapter sees its incompleteness as an *invitation* for its audience to collaborate and to participate in the construction of meaning. Its fragmentation should be seen as an opportunity to find the time, to discover rhythms that we share. As Richard Badenhausen rightly notes in his *T.S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration*, this unfinishedness and open-endedness occupy a central place in Eliot’s developing aesthetic: “the author is merely turning over his text into the possession of unknown others, who will themselves respond in ways the author cannot predict or even comprehend, so as to ask what the author ‘meant...is itself a meaningless question,’ argues Eliot” (133).¹⁵ After Hallie Flanagan’s 1933 Vassar Experimental Theatre performance of *Sweeney*

¹³ It is common for critics to view *Sweeney Agonistes*, given its inclusion in the “Poems” section of Eliot’s *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*, as a poem instead of a play; e.g. Sears Jayne’s “Mr. Eliot’s Agon”

¹⁴ While I disagree with his denial of *Sweeney* being fragmentary, I do agree with Jonathan Barker’s idea that the subtitling of it as “Fragments” “unfortunately militates against us considering it as a whole and worthy of our full attention: ‘Fragments’ carries with it the hint of failure” (103). Other critics, however, have taken a more sympathetic view of *Sweeney*, namely David Chinitz and Rachel Blau DuPlessis in *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) and *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908-1934* (Cambridge UP, 2001), respectively.

¹⁵ Furthermore, as Badenhausen notes, “Dramatic collaboration demanded the suppression of the personal to make space for other collaborators” (139). Examples of Eliot’s antipathy towards personality in literature can be found in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), “Four Elizabethan Dramatists” (1924), “Commentary” (*Criterion* 1926), and *After Strange Gods* (1934); Eliot also wrote on the necessity and benefits of collaboration in essays such as “Marie Lloyd” (1922) and “The Function of Criticism” (1923). See also Nevill Coghill’s reminiscing about Eliot’s openness to

Agonistes, Eliot stated that his work “ought simply to record the fusion of a number of experiences” instead of merely communicating the author’s message, ideas, or argument to readers and spectators (Flanagan 1943: 84).¹⁶ Eliot, then, focused less on communication and more upon the bringing together of various modes of finding and expressing a shared register of feeling or shared rhythm.

Given this focus on “fusion,” I would argue that by simply watching a fragmentary play like *Sweeney*, spectators cannot help but collaborate. Just as Auden’s *The Dance of Death* contained spaces and gaps in its text for the audience to fill in by their participation, the fragmentary text of *Sweeney Agonistes* calls for readers and spectators to work to address these gaps and lacunae. Instead of seeing its formal difficulty as a barrier for readers and spectators, I see *Sweeney* as “enjoining readers to form a more equal partnership with authors in the production of meaning” (Mahaffey 2007: 66).¹⁷ The question, however, remains as to why Eliot advocates such a drama. Eliot invites collaboration from spectators because of his interest in finding ways to communicate shared rhythms and rituals, things that bind people together without necessarily enforcing consensus.

both Hallie Flanagan and Rubert Doone’s productions of *Sweeney Agonistes* even though they differed from his view of the play: “*Sweeney Agonistes (An Anecdote or Two)*” from *T.S. Eliot: A Symposium* (1968: 82-87).

¹⁶ Eliot returns to this point in *Uses of Poetry and Uses of Criticism* (1986), where he states that “If poetry is a form of ‘communication,’ ...[what] is to be communicated is the poem itself” (21). On a side note, Hallie Flanagan was perhaps the dramaturg of note in interwar America. Her work with the Vassar Experimental Theatre and her *Shifting Scenes of the European Theatre* (1928) prompted the Roosevelt Administration to name Flanagan as the first head of the WPA’s Federal Theatre Project. At the FTP, she brought experimental drama and children’s theatre to countless Americans who’d never before witnessed live theatre; e.g. *The Living Newspaper* plays.

¹⁷ One must recall that it is a *more* equitable partnership, not a partnership of full equality; see n7 of prior chapter. Mahaffey clarifies this point by stating that these partnerships “may still yield inequalities of power, but it makes them unstable and reciprocal rather than one-sided” (124). I would argue that Eliot’s notion of impersonality implicitly supports this notion of partnership, as the gap left by the diminished personality and authority of the author allows for, if not calls out for, some sort of partnership.

Community began to occupy a central place in Eliot's philosophy, culminating in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), which saw shared communal values as being an integral part of creating a society capable of combatting despotism and tyranny. Eliot, then, sees theatre as "another way of affirming community" by "meld[ing] a challengingly diverse set of forms and cultural attitudes" (Malamud 2009: 240, 250). Instead of cooperatively addressing pressing issues as Auden and Isherwood advocate, Eliot wishes to create a community where these issues and quandaries are more readily addressed. As *The Rock* states, "There is no life that is not in community" (CPP 101).¹⁸ For Eliot, to create a community is also to create a new manner of living; his dramas sought to point towards ways of bringing these new communities into being by pressing spectators to consider the rhythms to which they respond and the ways these rhythms are communicated.

As a result, Eliot saw creating a communal experience as the *raison d'être* of drama. Although *Sweeney* does not revolve around community in the same manner that later plays like *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Family Reunion* do, it nonetheless centers on a collaborative, communal experience. The question remains, however, as to what this communal experience is predicated upon and how *Sweeney* attempts to create a communal, shared, intimate experience among its spectators while at the same time dramatizing the barriers that prevent these intimate, shared experiences from occurring in our everyday lives.

As mentioned previously, the Group Theatre production of *Sweeney Agonistes* arranged the audience in an L-shaped pattern so that it could never see the performance without seeing other audience members. The theatricality of the production could never be forgotten nor could

¹⁸ See n3 of this chapter for a discussion of what community means to Eliot and its import

the intimate sharedness of the experience be ignored.¹⁹ The question of what having the audience looking back into itself hopes to achieve, however, remains unaddressed.

Attentiveness, after all, is not quite a goal in and of itself but generally serves as a means to a larger end. Additionally, in Eliot's works, this intimate staging has a larger, more sweeping goal: establishing a community "united by an 'obligation,'" one predicated upon a recognition of and an acting upon the responsibilities, duties, obligations, and debts one has to others (Esposito 6). Roberto Esposito, in *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (2010), defines communality as not "having [a set of shared characteristics], but on the contrary is a debt, a pledge, a gift to be given....The subjects of a community are united by an 'obligation,' in the sense that we say 'I owe *you* something,' but not 'you owe *me* something'" (6).²⁰ Eliot, much like Esposito, sees an ethical valence to community – community is a matter of what we owe to others and how well we express and act upon these obligations. At no point do any of the characters in *Sweeney* express communality in this manner, signifying a lack of any sort of shared rhythm. Instead, what bonds Doris and Dusty together is a shared, crushing sense of inescapable ennui; what bonds the Johns Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein, and Krumpacker together needs little explanation.

¹⁹ In this respect, it is similar to the première of *At the Hawk's Well*. The première, with its mixture of the quotidian and the strange, never allowed for the theatricality of the performance to be forgotten; additionally, its ritualistic qualities and lack of spatial barriers created a sense of a shared experience amongst all present. Eliot, in "The Need for Poetic Drama" iterated that he wishes "to remind the audience that what they are seeing is a play, and not a photograph" (995).

²⁰ Esposito uses *communitas*, the Latin root of the modern community, because his examination of the varied etymological links of *communitas* – including *communis* and *munus* – illustrate how a notion of community does not necessarily focus on what people "have in common [as being]...that which unites the ethnic, territorial, and spiritual property of every one of its members" (3). Pages 3-6 as well as the remainder of the introduction (6-19) explore this etymology further.

Eliot suggests that it is not merely a personal failing within these characters that prevents substantive, restorative community. Instead, there is something wrong with the society of which these characters are a part that thwarts a sense of community and communality from developing. Eliot sees community as a network of obliging relationships and not merely a set of shared characteristics. In turn, he sees these relationships and the sort of interpersonal, responsible engagement they require as being foundational to the establishment of stable cultural communities. As stated previously, Eliot views society itself as being fragmented; *Sweeney* also suggests how nobody is searching to find a rhythm that could put the community back "in time." Eliot had touched upon these topics in *The Waste Land* (1922) and *Sweeney* demonstrates his continued interest in them: the banal conversation between Doris and Dusty bears more than a slight resemblance to the conversation between the husband and the wife in "A Game of Chess" (111-127) and the usage of tarot cards is reminiscent of "Madame Sosostriis, famous clairvoyante" and her "wicked pack of cards" in "The Burial of the Dead" (43, 46). What *Sweeney* illustrates is his interest in creating situations that demonstrably show the deleterious effects of this fragmentation and alienation as well as suggest ways of overcoming them.

Sweeney Agonistes shows what a stable, relationship-driven community might look like via its staging, which allows Eliot to create an intimate, communal experience. The play's plot and tone, however, portray what does not and will never constitute community. Eliot thus creates an atmosphere of community amongst spectators and then presents a drama that demonstrates the very things in society that prevent this sense of community from occurring. Whereas the spectators sit side-by-side with actors and other spectators and look across the performance space and see other spectators doing the same, the characters in *Sweeney* do not

recognize the nature or scope of their relationship with other characters. This dissonance is what makes *Sweeney* so novel in its discussion of community and communal experiences: it *shows* one thing through its staging whilst *saying* the complete opposite throughout the performance. The manner, then, in which Eliot depicts community in *Sweeney Agonistes* is twofold: (1) a community built on a shared focus, a group of people responding to the same rhythm and (b) the stillborn community dramatized onstage. *Sweeney Agonistes*, then, provides a ritualized experience of the limits of shared experience: Eliot crafts a ritualized atmosphere, which creates a momentary, transitory sort of community, but this transitory experience remains built around a depiction of what will always frustrate communal experience.²¹ *Sweeney Agonistes*, then, remains a successful, yet transitory, communal experience of unequivocal communal failure. The characters lack a shared ritual as well as lack the ability to see how their daily rituals, interactions, and practices create avenues for corresponding with and relating to one another in new, invigorating ways. The characters fail to see what they share as well as fail at “sharing” anything with one another.²² The rhythms they create, simply put, are all out of time with one another. I will explore first the manner of the spectators’ communal experience before turning to the text itself and its dramatization of communal failure.

Spectators and Forming an Obliging Community

²¹ Ritual creates a momentary community because rituals can only be conducted at certain times and under certain conditions. Rituals are not ongoing, unending processes but repeatable occurrences governed by certain conditions.

²² By “sharing” here I mean it in the colloquial sense of sharing one’s ideas, feelings, and the like with another person in an attempt to communicate how one feels and thinks about a particular topic. In short, one could argue that the characters think that they share nothing when in fact they might be directing their attention in unproductive directions.

As Desmond MacCarthy noted in his review, the spectators of the Group Theatre performance of *Sweeney Agonistes* were “sitting on the stage itself,” with the actors entering through the audience members to reach the “empty space in the middle” that served as the performance space (80). This resembles the première of *At the Hawk’s Well* nineteen years prior, where all the players save the Guardian entered through the audience in an almost ritualistic procession. Also, the close proximity of the spectators to the players resembled Yeats’s dramaturgy, as did Eliot’s insistence on the players being masked:

The action should be stylised as in the Noh drama – see Ezra Pound’s book and Yeats’ preface and notes to *The Hawk’s Well*. Characters *ought* to wear masks; the ones wearing old masks ought to give the impression of being young persons (as actors) and vice versa....The characters should be in a shabby flat, seated at a refectory table, facing the audience (Flanagan 1945: 83).

Doone’s Group Theatre production followed the lead of Flanagan’s Vassar production, with all of the characters, save Sweeney himself, wearing masks. Doone, perhaps hearing the echo of Yeats’s argument that “*masked players seem stranger when there is no mechanical means of separating them from us*” (CP 136), had these masked players sit among the audience members when they were not speaking or involved in a scene.

MacCarthy states that the staging thus “turn[ed] the audience itself into a kind of chorus” (81). By having audience members serve as “a kind of chorus,” the staging implicitly gives them a very specific role to play. Chorus members typically act as interested spectators

who state the religious and moral implications of the staged action.²³ They thus have an important explicatory and mediatory role to play. A chorus member is one whose role is both to witness *and* to speak. Additionally, chorus members were vital parts of completing the rhythm for a performance, given that their lines were in a variety of meters and not just in iambic trimeter, the standard meter for other speaking parts. Every word the chorus uttered was governed by rhythm, either in “a ‘marching’ anapestic rhythm” (Hughes 2011, 100) or a “music-dance rhythms” (Kitto 1956, 2). Eliot’s tacit casting of the spectators as chorus members invests them with the responsibility to find collectively a suitable rhythm.

Given his appreciation for the Cambridge Anthropologists, Eliot would have seen the “chorus and understanding its function” as central to recognizing how “art [rose] out of ritual” (Harrison 1913: 123).²⁴ The Cambridge Ritualists, with their interest in myth and ritual, located the origins of drama and myth in the *sparagmos* of Dionysian ritual.²⁵ Ritual, for Harrison, is *dromenon*, “a thing done” (26); but, more specifically, it is a *shared* action: “It is in the common act, the common or collective emotion, that ritual starts” (126).²⁶ The chorus proved so essential

²³ It is also worth noting that chorus members typically sympathize with the characters onstage. The implications that this has on *Sweeney* prove interesting, as one could see the staging not only creating a communal experience but also incorporating a sympathy for that which hinders communal experiences.

²⁴ While I do not want to conflate ritual with drama overmuch, it bears mentioning that both Yeats and Eliot held the work of Cambridge Ritualists such as Gilbert Murray, Jane Ellen Harrison, A. B. Cooke, and F. M. Cornford in high esteem. Eliot does, however, link enacted ritual with poetic rhythm; given his knowledge of how choruses functioned in Greek drama, this is not surprising.

²⁵ *Sparagmos* (σπαραγμός) means to tear apart, to rend, to pull into pieces and often refers to the sacrificial dismemberment during certain Dionysian rites. See Euripides’s *The Bacchae*, where Pentheus is torn apart by his mother, Agave, and a group of Maenads during Bacchic rites as well as Orpheus’s dismemberment by Thracian women in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (11.1)

²⁶ Harrison, however, bifurcates ritual and art because of the difference between spectator and celebrant, stating that the “new [more passive] attitude of the spectator...[shows] the difference between ritual and art...the *dromenon*, the thing actually done by yourself has become a *drama*, a thing also done, but abstracted from your doing” (127). This notion of passive spectatorship, however, does not account for types of drama that employ spectators as active and vital collaborators. The key difference between art and ritual for Harrison was that ritual had a practical end, whereas art did not. Ritual, however, did make “a bridge between real life and art, a bridge over which in primitive times, men

to Harrison, then, because “the drama arose out of a ritual dance” (138); it is the orchestral chorus that “stands for ritual, for the stage in which we were all worshippers, all joined in a rite of practical intent” (141).²⁷ Beyond the chorus’ rhythmic function, Eliot thus views the chorus as a way of creating either an experience close to ritual or of imparting a ritualistic tone and mood to an experience. Spectators, then, are tasked with finding a new rhythm as well as creating new rituals; doing so, Eliot suggests, might lead to the discovery of a new drum to replace the one “we have lost.”²⁸

Ritual remains integral to Eliot’s dramaturgy not just because of its literary historical import but also because Eliot saw “the stage in which we were...all joined in a rite of practical intent” as a *communal* space.²⁹ Unlike Yeats, Eliot maps this ritualistic experience onto a communal one. Chinitz correctly argues in *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2004) that Eliot sought to return to a ritually-organized tradition as opposed to a realist-based one in *Sweeney Agonistes*. Chinitz, however, posits this as simply an “unworkable conception” (119) because of its inability to reach a popular audience “suckled on realism and increasingly unused to ritual”

must pass” (129). Ackerman correctly notes that this “must pass” is what “plainly roots her theory in the aesthetics of the eighties and nineties” with its insistence on “the sharp antithesis between life and art” (2002: 156).

²⁸ Just as Auden and Isherwood’s refusal in *The Ascent of F6* to provide an alternative way beyond those given by Ransom and the Abbot prompts spectators to reflect and come up with suitable alternatives, Eliot never hints at what the drum could be or what could be an instrument to express what rhythms and rituals we share. I read Eliot’s refusal as a challenge to spectators and readers to create instruments suitable to their own historical moment.

²⁹ The difference between ritual and communal must be further explicated. By ritualistic, I mean that predicated on certain rites; it is primarily a matter of language and practice, as the word *ritus* has its root in religious observance, practice, and language. By communal, I mean something more expansive than rites alone. Communal simply means that which is held in common by a certain group at a given historical moment; this can include shared rites, practices, values, experiences, customs, habits, and the like. Eliot, as “The Beating of a Drum” illustrates, saw ritual as contributing towards community formation.

(121).³⁰ Eliot's turn to ritualized traditions should instead be seen as part of Eliot's wider interest in new conceptions of audience and new avenues for audience collaboration that, while perhaps not mastered in *Sweeney Agonistes*, play out in Eliot's later interwar dramas and also pay out increasingly large dividends when viewed in terms of postwar avant-garde drama and its conception of audience. Additionally, given his attempt to find different rhythms around which communities can be formed, perhaps the point is less whether the attempt is "unworkable" and more the need to simply experience and contribute to this attempt.

In order to achieve this kind of experience, however, Eliot had to craft a new sort of audience. Ritual, as something that is predicated on obligation and what one brings to a given rite, perhaps provided for Eliot the most plausible avenue for such coherence. For Eliot, ritual creates community not through a set of shared characteristics but through both a shared experience and a committing oneself to be a part of that experience.³¹ Eliot builds off of the ideas of Cornford and Murray when he argues that "drama was originally ritual; and ritual...a set of repeated movements" (12).³² Ritual, then, is not merely repetition in front of an audience; to Eliot, repetition for its own sake is the act of "an imbecile."

³⁰ While Eliot always wanted a wide audience for his work, the question remains whether expecting popular success given the small venue size and the nature of the text was a reasonable expectation in the first place. *Sweeney* was markedly experimental whereas Eliot dramas were decidedly not avant-garde.

³¹ While shared characteristics and shared practices could be argued to have some overlap, it must be remembered that shared characteristics in the interwar era oftentimes meant shared racial or ethnic characteristics. As was the case with Nazism, Fascism, or Falangism, these shared racial or ethnic characteristics were then used to valorize or denigrate certain segments of the population.

³² This is not to suggest that ritual is simply repetitive movements. Repetition and ritual, while similar in some respects, differ greatly in their execution and intent. Repetition often works to focus one's attention, calm one down, or take one's focus off of other actions or events – and many rituals do likewise; the difference is that ritual *must* occur at a certain time and under certain conditions. Ritual, in short, contains more restrictions than repetition; the latter can practically occur at any time, whereas ritual requires a certain framework, orthodoxy, and governing practices.

In *Sweeney*, Eliot demonstrates how repetition, while it may have its own rhythms, does not carry the affective and intellectual power of ritual. Repetition can be transformed into a distraction, something that prevents one from interrogating one's milieu, whereas ritual oftentimes operates to focus one's attention on a particular idea or action. For Eliot, what invests ritual with meaning and import is the "reason for [it]," reasons that both change over time and become "more plausible." Meaningful, substantive rituals remain predicated upon remembrance, the preservation and celebration of certain important ideas, traditions, and qualities. These are things agreed upon by the society performing and viewing the ritual, but are also things capable of change; Eliot understood that "when ritual becomes static, when it ceases to adjust and to adapt, it becomes obsolete, empty of meaning, and eventually dies out" as well as the "need to modify...to address current social conditions" (Drewal 1992, 8). Eliot sees ritual as giving people a means of and a reason for communicating with one another since ritual, by definition, always constitutes a shared action. Eliot expands this common notion of ritual by suggesting that the finding of shared, meaningful rituals might also be the finding of new ties by which society can be bound together in more stable, more coherent ways.³³

In the eleven years separating the publication of "The Beating of the Drum" and the Group Theatre production of *Sweeney*, Eliot began to see the import of audience collaboration and the "form[ing of] a more equal partnership" with audience members. Eliot became particularly attuned to the types of attentiveness and communication collaboration engenders as a ritual capable of fostering greater stability in society. While the staging of *Sweeney* as well as

³³ The fact that Eliot later identifies these ties as being rooted in Christianity remains somewhat beside the point insofar as my argument is concerned. As I stated previously, what interests me is less his specific *choice* of ritual than the role ritual played in his notion of audience and community.

the audience serving as a *de facto* chorus create this sort of “partnership,” the text of *Sweeney Agonistes* illustrates how an utter lack of attentiveness or shared communication prevent the sort of shared experiences and values that Eliot sees as vital ingredients for community formation. The following few pages will take a different approach than that of the majority of *Sweeney Agonistes* scholarship. Instead of focusing on Sweeney himself and the second part of the drama, “Fragment of an Agon,” the following pages will center on the conversations between Doris and Dusty in “Fragment of a Prologue” and with the four Johns that end the fragment.³⁴ Both conversations illustrate how an inability to communicate and respond meaningfully circumvents the occurrence of a shared experience.

The Characters’ Dramatization of Communal Failure

Sweeney Agonistes has a crushing feeling of impotency at its heart. This does not refer to the fact that it is an unfinished fragment incapable of ever being completed, but instead to what William V. Spanos terms as the failed, “obsessive efforts [of Dusty and Doris] to evade the meaninglessness of life...to evade the dread of Nothingness that threatens to break through the surface of their boredom” (1970: 10). The characters, whether Dusty and Doris or their four Johns: Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein, and Krumpacker, are members of “a society which uses words instead of thoughts and feelings...[giving rise to] aberration, and eventual decomposition or petrification” (Eliot 1934: 628). The first fragment of *Sweeney* illustrates how

³⁴ The majority of scholarship on *Sweeney Agonistes* focuses on “Fragment of an Agon,” which introduces the character of Sweeney and the “tormented speeches” he delivers (Chinitz 109). Other critiques focus on the “exquisite blend of violence and restraint” (Coghill 117) in Sweeney’s dialogue, or their “bizarre mutation of what is still recognizably a vaudevillian comic device” (Chinitz 110), or the “racial ventriloquism” (North 1994: 9) employed by Eliot throughout.

this reliance on “us[ing] words instead of thoughts and feelings” is the root cause of the dread and boredom that plague Doris and Dusty.³⁵ Eschewing thought and feeling in favor of words troubles Eliot because words, as Doris and Dusty’s conversation illustrate, communicate so little.³⁶ Instead of affectively and intellectually connecting with one another, their relationship is predicated on banal conversations about how “Sam’s a gentleman through and through.../But Pereira won’t do./ We can’t have Pereira” (CPP 75) and attempting to divine their future via tarot cards.

As a result, Dusty and Doris’s pursuit to prevent “Nothingness” from “break[ing] through the surface of their boredom” is what cuts them off from the sort of “thoughts and feelings” that might allow them to *share* something or share a common experience.³⁷ Instead, they rely on platitudes, attempts at divination, and awkward conversations with their cliché-spouting Johns to pass the time. The only thing that invests this passing of time with any immediacy or urgency is the fear of death, which punctures the “surface of their boredom.”

When Doris flips over the two of spades, they both lament, “THAT’S THE COFFIN” (77) and

³⁵ One could argue that these characters’ evasion occurs because Doris is “a victim, a murderess....Her role is to sit at home, dealing out the cards which are emblems of the fate that will overtake her when she turns up the Hanged Man or the Two of Spades which signifies the Coffin...[she is the] devotee [of Sweeney]” (Spender 189). Spender is perhaps correct when he states that Doris functions “like other women in [Eliot’s] work,” (189) and remains less than a fully fleshed-out character. While discussing Eliot’s treatment of female characters in his works goes beyond the scope of my argument, Spender’s point bears consideration. Only Monica Claverton in *The Elder Statesman* (1958) seems to be on par with her male counterparts, with the exception perhaps of the ill-fated Celia in *The Cocktail Party* (1949). Eliot, unfortunately, rarely employs female characters in the same fashion as he does his male characters; they often remain subservient to the whims and plans of *or* less developed than their male counterparts.

³⁶ In some respects, Eliot’s suspicion of languages’ ability to communicate anticipates Pinter’s treatment of language in his early and middle-period plays. While Eliot does not employ silence in the same fashion, his noting how language can be warped by intellect and denuded of affect does anticipate Pinter; c.f. M. C. Bradbrook’s *English Dramatic Form* (1965).

³⁷ While one could obviously argue that the quotidian does accrue affective power over time, that is not quite the case with Doris, Dusty, et alia. In order for the quotidian to become “a zone of....the accidental and the permanent, imagination and affect, the personal and the social” it must also be “a zone of opposition, intersection, or interconnection....within a context of relations and interactions” (Sheringham 2006: 300). The interconnection, interaction, and intersection requisite for the everyday to accrue affective power are never shown in *Sweeney*. As Marianne Moore states in her review of *Sweeney*, “the core of the drama....is loneliness without solitude” (1933: 108).

attempt to distract themselves from this portent of doom. The characters, then, in “Fragment of a Prologue” remain more interested in passing the time instead of passing *through* time with one another. Instead of actively sharing time, Dusty and Doris simply let the minutes tick away or spend their energy attempting to inure themselves to time’s passing.

Eliot suggests that Dusty and Doris merely pass the time instead of sharing time with one another because their historical moment lacks meaningful ways for people to connect with one another. While the 1934-1935 Group Theatre performances may have, as Richard Badenhausem argues in his *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (2004), established and reinforced “within a culture a set of shared values...[as the] set-up forced spectators to become drawn physically into the events of the drama,” the text itself illustrates a society lacking this sense of ritual, sharing, and collaboration (124).³⁸ As Ronald Peacock argues, Eliotic drama wishes to “give a picture of society...in situations of suffering” (1977: 98). Stephen Spender concurs, stating that Eliotic drama hopes to capture “the fragmentary present ...[and] the breakdown of present values” (1951: 288). *Sweeney Agonistes* provides not only a “picture of...suffering” but a diagnosis of *why* this suffering permeates society: no meaningful ways of sharing experience, of actually communicating with others presently exist. In *Sweeney*, everyone remains out of time.

A brief examination of Dusty and Doris’ conversation illustrates how shared experience remains elusive in *Sweeney*. Their dialogue heavily on repetition, and, as is the case with

³⁸ In this respect, *Sweeney* resembles ritual; however, being “drawn physically” into an event is not quite the same as being as active a participant as ritual often requires. *Sweeney* demonstrates the relationship between drama and ritual without conflating the two.

Dusty's refrain that "Cards are queer" (77, 78) remains nothing but a cold comfort. Doris wants a *response*, which is perhaps the one thing she cannot attain in such a fragmented, suffering society. To receive a response is to establish correspondence, balance, and congruity; instead, all she receives are "words instead of thoughts and feelings" (Eliot 1934: 628).⁴⁰

The communicative failure experienced by Doris permeates the remainder of "Fragment of a Prologue." The speech patterns of the four Johns who visit Dusty and Doris's flat exemplify failed communication because of their reliance upon cliché and commonplaces. Their dialogue is, in essence, dialogue that communicates nothing intellectually or affectively; it is simple filler, quite truly "words instead of thoughts and feelings."⁴¹ As David Nally argues, clichés are "moments of *us*-ing and *them*-ing, which allow "us" to assign "them" a place in *our* world" (2003, 296). Clichés, then, are to some degree predicated on hierarchy and exclusion; I argue that the feelings of alienation such linguistic formations engender is central to *Sweeney*. Cliché, as Patrick R. Mullen illustrates, often "points to the broader articulation, maintenance, and circulation of a hegemonic common sense, that power-laced sense of what is true and false, what questions are legitimate and illegitimate" (2012, 161). Additionally, clichés denote "a production of language which is increasingly removed from the individual's control...its locus

⁴⁰ According to Charlton T. Lewis' *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (1897), the classical Latin root of respond is *responsus*, which denotes a harmonious relationship, correspondence, and congruity in addition to the action of answering a question; *responsum* also has jurisprudential and mystical ties, as the word can also denote the response of an oracle or the answer given by a jurist to a legal query. In short, by failing to respond adequately, Dusty can be seen either to have failed to establish a deeper bond with Doris *or* to have transgressed the obligatory ties of a pre-existing relationship.

⁴¹ Clichés and platitudes remain distinct from ritualistic communication much in the same ways that repetition does. Clichés can, as Ruth Ambossy argues, serve a vital function in the reading process, to "help direct the reading; [a cliché] shapes the receiver's attitude towards the text it belongs to, as well as to the social discourse it exemplifies" (34). I would argue, though, that this "opportunity for critical elaboration that ... results in the articulation of a critical sensibility of the reader" (Mullen 2012: 161) never occurs for the characters of *Sweeney*. Furthermore, *reading* a cliché and having it "direct the reading" and "shape the receiver's attitude" remains a much more mediated experience than *hearing* a cliché during a live performance.

[being instead] the printing house, the newspaper office" (McCormack 1988, 329).⁴² By employing clichés, one uses the words of another and, as proxy, lacks the ability to imbue these words with one's own thoughts or feelings.

Sweeney depicts the frustration and anxiety of *experiencing* these clichéd feelings and responses when a more measured, considered, and sincere response is needed. What Eliot illustrates, then, is how cliché not only contributes to this normative, hegemonic "common sense" but also how this common sense is predicated on forgoing intimate, affective connections and responses. The two "American gentlemen" of the group, Klipstein and Krumpacker, merely spout common wisdom about London, despite only having "hit this town last night for the first time" (78). They both agree that London's "a little too gay for us/...I'm afraid we couldn't stand the pace" and that "London's a slick place, London's a swell place,/ London's a fine place to come on a visit—" (79). They've failed to truly experience London or even give it a fair chance, instead relying on clichéd "common sense" as their guide. Granted, one could assign their speech and behavior to either nervousness, logorrhea that arises whilst attempting to cope with an unfamiliar place and new people, or simple social awkwardness; doing so, however, misses the point that they rely on cliché to foster a sense of security and comfort. Clichés lack, then, the natural, human rhythm of speech and are instead a "mechanical reproduction of languages or of signs" and represent the "industrialization" of language, a language denuded of substantive

⁴² While one could argue that one is always using the words of another since "Iterability alters" as words and phrases can be utilized in new settings and contexts, cliché operates differently from other learned languages and modes of communication (Derrida 62). Cliché differs from other learned languages in that it generally lacks any political or affective potency; as McCormack and Mullen argue, it remains the language of the sociopolitical and economic status quo, language used by those not interested in transformative social change, social justice, or equity.

human emotion (McCormack 1988, 326).⁴³ Even when asked the most simple of questions by Doris: “You like London, Mr. Klipstein?” the following exchange occurs:

KRUMPACKER: Do we like London? do we like London!

Do we like London!! Eh what Klip?

KLIPSTEIN: Say, Miss – er –uh –London’s *swell*.

We like London *fine*.

KRUMPACKER: Perfectly *slick*.

[....]

KLIPSTEIN:London’s *a little too gay for us*

Yes, I’ll say *a litte to gay for us*

KRUMPACKER: Yes London’s *a little too gay for us*

Don’t think I mean anything *coarse*–

But I’m afraid we couldn’t stand the pace.

What about it Klip?

KLIPSTEIN: You said it, Krum.

London’s *a slick* place, London’s *a swell* place (79, emphases mine).

The amount of repetition here exceeds even the exchange between Dusty and Doris immediately preceding the four johns’ arrival. They rely on clichés to develop viable responses to patently simple questions. Granted, expecting Krumpacker and Klipstein to provide detailed, intricate responses to the queries of two prostitutes they just met moments earlier might seem

⁴³ Following from McCormack, it is no stretch to say that there is something not only unfeeling and mechanical about clichés, but also something that is inhuman, that transgresses language’s capacity to communicate thoughts and feelings. Instead, all that remains is reproduction; production, presentation, and representation are all elided in pursuit of reproducibility.

unfair. Their reliance upon repetition, clichéd expressions, and the commonsensical nonetheless brings to the forefront the lack of “thoughts and feelings” in both their speech and worldview. The meeting of Dusty and Doris and the four Johns remains predicated on exchange. Eliot prompts the question, then, as to the sorts of havoc that a valorization of exchange can wreak on shared experiences and substantive communication; Eliot thus draws attention to the relationship between hegemonic commercial and consumerist forces and clichéd speech. The question Eliot implicitly poses is whether a shared experience or substantive dialogue that *might* give way to a communal experience can ever occur in a relationship predicated primarily on exchange. If one’s interlocutor only ever represents “congealed labour-time” (Marx 130), how can any sort of commonality, sharedness, dialogue, expression, or intimacy occur? In such a world how can this lack of “thoughts and feelings” be rectified?

This lack of “thoughts and feelings” in the speech of Krumpacker and Klipstein can also be seen as indicative of a society suffering from what Eliot terms an “urbanization of the mind,” a worldview resulting from adherence to exchange and mechanization instead of encounter and discovery.⁴⁴ In such a world, Eliot suggests, finding the “lost” drum or creating one anew will prove difficult. Klipstein and Krumpacker seem to be, following Weber’s quotation of Goethe, “sensualists without heart; ...[a] nullity [who] imagines that it has attained a level of civilization

⁴⁴ Eliot’s “A Commentary.” *Criterion* XVIII (October 1938–January 1939): 58-62, qtd. 60. Eliot, reviewing Lymington’s *Famine in England*, focuses his argument on financial and agricultural systems predicated on exchange instead of production, arguing: “It is a melancholy thought that only the imminent danger of a national famine in the event of war arouses people’s mind to the neglect of the land” (59). For Eliot, these are not simply problems because more people spend their developmental years in “an urban background” (60); instead, worldviews centered on exchange and profitability delimit one’s ability to have a shared or a communal experience.

never before achieved" (Weber 1930: 182).⁴⁵ Their heartlessness manifests itself not through menacing discourse but through a refusal of substantive, engaging discourse, either with the prostitutes or amongst themselves.

Eliot, in *Sweeney Agonistes*, presents a lack of responsiveness as inimical to any sort of shared or communal experience.⁴⁶ The sense of obligation so vital for Eliot's notion of community cannot be fostered when no responsiveness exists. For Eliot, eliciting a response means opening up a space of encounter, a place for contestation, a state of vulnerability, and a potential area for shared experience and understanding. Responding to another's query, then, might be what allows for shared experiences to occur; one cannot, after all, share something with another if communication, agreement, or understanding does not exist between oneself and another or if one does not feel she owes her interlocutor a response. Given Eliot's interest in the development of more stable societies, one could also view this inability to respond as being detrimental to the societal stability we have come to value, making one more vulnerable to extremist social views, political bombast and demagoguery, and propagandistic mass media.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ It is worth remembering that Chinitz, in his discussion of *Sweeney Agonistes*, claims that Eliot has "such powerful intricacy of feeling and complexity of attitude as to keep the spirit of the play profoundly enigmatic....[and] to cast suspicion on the very idea of civilization" (2001: 15, emphases mine).

⁴⁶ This is reminiscent of Auden and Isherwood's *The Ascent of F6*, which equates a lack of responsiveness to ethical failure. Eliot remained more interested in characters who crafted their own idioms rather than those who employed clichés. As Jonathan Monroe, in "Idiom and Cliché in T. S. Eliot and John Ashberry" (*Contemporary Literature* 31.1, Spring 1990), argues: "To speak in clichés is...to lose oneself in language, to be stripped of a self in the most discursive sense, not to find oneself in the common-place of language but to lose oneself in it, *not to take one's share of community property but to give oneself improperly to the common*" (18, emphasis mine).

⁴⁷ It has been the fashion in the past to see Eliot as being cozy with authoritarian political views but such a view ignores both his commentaries in *Criterion* and the lengths he took to formulate intricate responses to pressing, complex, and unprecedented political, social, and ethical quandaries. This chapter wishes to historicize Eliot's attempts at addressing these problems whilst also showing how his attempts to address these issues anticipate and inform postwar dramas' attempt to address equally pressing and complex problems. Eliot found fascism and communism alike to be overly simplistic answers to complex questions.

Both refusing to respond as well as inadequately responding,⁴⁸ then, frustrates the occurrence of common, shared experiences, thus frustrating the rise of the sort of stable society Eliot constantly valorizes.⁴⁹

Sweeney Agonistes, then, performs the very thing that it is *not*. The script itself is as far *from* a shared experience as the Group Theatre and Vassar performances are *to* a shared, communal experience. The staging and seating of Doone's Group Theatre production prompt spectators and actors to engage with one another in powerful new ways. As Richard Badenhausen states:

Eliot saw collaborative performances as a way of establishing and reinforcing within a culture a set of shared values. The Group Theatre performances of *Sweeney Agonistes* in 1934-5 took this involvement of the audience to an extreme, placing the drama at the center of the theatre space, with the audience encircling the action. Nothing separated the masked actors from the viewers....[the] set-up forced spectators to become drawn physically into the events of the drama and finally, at the play's climax, *united them with the performers* as a blackout blanketed the room (124, emphasis mine).

⁴⁸ One could argue that a refusal to respond denotes a silent protest, an unwillingness to agree to the normative standards with which one is presented; c.f. Kennan Ferguson's "Silence: A Politics" (*Contemporary Political Theory* 2, 2003), Max Picard's *World of Silence* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), and Tannen and Saville-Troike's *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1985). I would be wary, however, of viewing the silences or refusals to respond in *Sweeney* as protest or non-normative. Instead, I would argue that Eliot would see their unresponsiveness as indicative of their being very much a part of and very much shaped by the interwar status quo.

⁴⁹ It is worth clarifying yet again that my goal remains descriptive; this section describes *how* Eliot seeks to bring about these stable, more coherent societies without endorsing them. As I said in footnote 12, it is oftentimes Eliot's quest for "greater stability" that brings out the worst in him. Whilst I do not think that *Sweeney* need be included with the likes of *After Strange Gods*, it nonetheless illustrates Eliot's questing for what can create a communal experience; the difference is that, instead of locating community solely in the Anglo-Catholic tradition as other texts do, *Sweeney* focuses more on ritual, shared experiences, or the absence thereof.

The production *united* spectators and performers by its L-shaped staging and having the performers sit amongst spectators. This created a shared experience that called attention to the lack of “thoughts and feelings” Eliot saw as endemically plaguing his society, political systems, and historical moment. *Sweeney Agonistes* constitutes an experience of limits, showing spectators what delimits and prevents shared experiences from occurring, as well as a shared experience that traverses these limitations.

Murder in the Cathedral, performed in the Chapter House of the Canterbury Cathedral on June 15, 1935, just a few months after the close of the Group Theatre’s initial run of *Sweeney Agonistes*, builds upon Eliot’s interest in both shared, communal experiences and what frustrates these experiences. *Murder in the Cathedral* explicitly demonstrates how spectators might be complicit in constructing and maintaining the barriers, boundaries, and limits that prevent shared experiences from occurring while also contemplating how the difference between certain types of communal experiences.⁵⁰ By 1935, Nazism had clearly, and brutally, proven that authoritarian, fascist regimes could facilitate the feelings of shared, communal experiences. In *Murder*, Eliot depicts how this *communauté foi* arose whilst also pointing towards ways of combatting it or preventing its occurrence in England. The collaborative experience created in *Murder in the Cathedral* focuses less on what limits shared experiences and more upon the differences between certain sorts of collaboration. Eliot relies on collaborative techniques to draw attention to the relationship between collaboration and complicity, between shared

⁵⁰ I do not think that this notion of complicity is entirely absent from *Sweeney*, but it is not its focus. The closest *Sweeney* comes is showing how “we were all Crippens at heart” (Coghill 117). Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen was tried and executed in 1910 for the murder of his wife, Cora; the case captured the popular imagination and went on to inspire numerous film adaptations, novels, and stories. In *Sweeney*, though, complicity is less the issue than *similarity* and containing within one something that wishes to wreak havoc upon the ties that bind societies together; *Murder in the Cathedral*, however, speaks of how one benefits from and abets a world largely dependent on “words instead of thoughts and feelings.”

experiences that can generate societal renewal and shared experiences that stall this sort of renewal. The following section examines these relationships in *Murder in the Cathedral*, focusing particularly on the usage of direct address to the audience during Part II of the play.

II. The Collaborator's Choice

Despite its success, Eliot never seemed at ease with *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), his dramatization of the December 1170 martyrdom of Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket. At best, he saw it as powerful, well-crafted poetry that remained theatrically unsatisfying or incapable of competing with commercial prose drama. Despite it having an almost two-year professional run, *Murder* nonetheless represented a failure for Eliot because it could not ever fully “enter into overt competition with prose drama,” as its content and form remained mired in the distant past (141).⁵¹ Instead of viewing the play as a strange anomaly or suffering from “occasional obscurity and frequent dullness,” this section argues that *Murder in the Cathedral* presents spectators with the opportunity to collaborate and reflect on collaboration in complex, inventive, and unexpected ways (Watts 1). In short, this chapter disagrees with both Eliot and the original director, E. Martin Browne, who complained that “the play was a non-event” (94-95). Instead of seeing *Murder in the Cathedral* as a “non-event,” in the remainder of this chapter I argue that it was one of the single-most influential theatre events of the interwar era.

Additionally, the manner that Eliot utilizes direct address in the closing portions of the drama

⁵¹ It should be remembered, however, that *Murder* was, prior to *The Cocktail Party*, by far the most successful of all of Eliot's plays. After its initial run at the Chapter House in Canterbury Cathedral, it ran for almost 400 performances at Ashley Duke's Mercury Theatre between the autumn of 1935 and the spring of 1937, retaining Robert Speaight as Beckett but bringing in a full professional cast. It had two moderately successful runs in New York and Boston and was broadcast on BBC radio and television in 1936. Eliot's dissatisfaction, then, seems less to do with its “popularity” and more its ability to serve as a model for a sustained, “overt competition” with the realist prose dramas that then filled most theatre houses.

not only anticipate the attempts at collectivity found in John Arden's avant-garde postwar dramas, it also anticipates the manner that Beckett treats collaboration and complicity in his dramas.⁵² As Michael Sayers claims in his *Criterion* review of the play:

[it is] a challenge...it repudiates almost all the popular values, in life and theatre, of our time. It may occasion a revolution in popular thought and theatre through subsequent imitations, and by its direct influence similar to that brought about by the comedies of Shaw. Or it may go down to the popular limbo as one of the curiosities of a moribund theatre (655).

At first glance, it seems that the "revolution...through subsequent imitations" never occurred, and that *Murder in the Cathedral* was little more than a successful "curiosit[y]." Literary history, however, is rarely a matter of first glances but instead revolves around correcting and expanding one's field of vision. It is such an expansion that this section and the following chapter advocates. The "revolution" to which Sayers alludes did not come from direct imitators but indirectly, from postwar dramatists who furthered the experimentation and views of audience set forth by Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*.⁵³

⁵² In some respects, Eliot creates or brings forth a theatre of dullness, one that allows for if not encourages inattentiveness. The usage of boredom, dullness, and ennui in *Murder* anticipates the function the same in Samuel Beckett's postwar dramas. Many audience members found the moments prior to the assassination and direct address of the knights to be somewhat slow moving, hence their shock at this brief moment of action and the subsequent direct address. I would argue that, much like "[t]he reader [of *Paradise Lost*] who falls before the lure of Satanic rhetoric displays again the weakness of Adam, and his inability to avoid repeating [his] fall," (Fish 38) the spectator of *Murder in the Cathedral* who becomes bored and inattentive might come to see his or her boredom and inattention as proof positive of their being complicit in the "state of affairs" that governs the world. Their inability to become interested or relate to Beckett's struggles might itself be an indicator of how mechanized, individualized, and consumerist spectators have allowed themselves to become.

⁵³ Eliot's being seen as a forerunner of postwar experimental drama should not come as a surprise given William Spanos's stating that *Sweeney* belongs in the pantheon of absurdist drama, alongside the works of Durrenmatt, Ionesco, Pinter, and Frisch. Herbert Howarth, in his *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (1964) states that "the comedy augmenting and directing the animosity [in *Sweeney*]...persisted in the so-called Angry Young Men" (336-337). Joanna Bentley, in her biography of Hallie Flanagan, goes well beyond Howarth and Spanos, stating boldly,

Murder in the Cathedral both revises and supplements ideas of how spectators collaborate with a performance. The “challenge” that Sayers mentions issues itself most clearly after the assassination of Beckett, when the Knights who just carried out the assassination “*advance to the front of the stage and address the audience*” (CPP 215). Their direct address demonstrates Eliot’s interest in the relationship between certain forms of collaboration and complicity with the status quo; Eliot suggests that one had to decide which rhythm to follow, to move to and which rhythms to ignore. All of Part II builds towards this moment of direct address, as it serves as a response to the four tempters who visited Becket in Part I, who tempted Becket with physical safety and comfort, wealth and fame, political influence and power, and with self-serving martyrdom, respectively. Becket responds to their temptations by accepting the inevitability of his assassination:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:

Temptation shall not come in this kind again.

The last temptation is the greatest treason:

To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

[...]

I know that history at all times draws

The strangest consequence from remotest cause.

[...]

“without *Sweeney Agonistes*, the works of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Sam Shepard are unimaginable” (1988: 135). M. C. Bradbrook echoes Bentley by arguing that Eliot’s dramas should be “seen rather as an indirect influence behind the very different work of Pinter or Albee” (1965: 171). Following Bentley and Bradbrook, I would argue that *Murder* should be seen as an indirect influence of postwar drama.

I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end.

Now to my good Angel, whom God appoints

To be my guardian, hover over the sword's point (*CPP* 196, 197).

Instead of agreeing to collaborate with the king and gain riches and fame or join with the barons and resist Henry II, Becket refuses to work with the powers that be altogether. Becket alternatively chooses to resist the temptation to act for his own benefit, deciding instead to “no longer act or suffer” but to accept his death. Becket views his death as having the power to call into question the status quo, “to warn [humankind] and to lead them” (*CPP* 199). The ethical dilemma of *Murder* concerns with whom does one collaborate and the long-term consequences of said collaboration. The speeches of the four knights following their murder of Beckett bring this dilemma to the fore and show the varied ways that complicity disguises itself.

Whereas the four tempters of the first act spoke solely to Becket, the knights in the final act directly address the audience, providing reasons for their actions. The knights cast the spectators as jurors, appealing to the “long established principle of Trial by Jury” (215). *Murder in the Cathedral*, by issuing this challenge, presents spectators with a “problematic reality” (Freire 168), one where the spectators must collaboratively decide on the knights’ guilt or innocence but also one that pushes them to acknowledge their own complicity in the knights’ actions.⁵⁴ This complicity can be seen in the closing moments of the apologia of the third knight, Hugh de Morville, who states:

⁵⁴ I invoke Freire here because his goal of a “critical analysis of a problematic reality” (168) largely mirrors that of Eliot. Friere, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues that “No one can...unveil the world for another” (169) and have meaningful change occur; instead, “[all people] must also become Subjects of this act [of unveiling]” (169). Eliot largely reflects this active “unveil[ing]” in his desire that spectators see the unfitness of the “current state of affairs that [they] approve” and work collaboratively to address and then pass sentence on this “state of affairs.”

But, if you have now arrived at a just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the State, remember that it is we who took the first step. We have been instrumental in bringing about the state of affairs that you approve. We have served your interests; we merit your applause; and if there is any guilt whatever in the matter, you must share it with us (*CPP* 217-218).⁵⁵

While one may undoubtedly be tempted to discount de Morville's speech as simple sophistry, doing so ignores the real choice that Eliot presents to his spectators. Eliot poses a simple question to spectators: exactly what sort of collaborator or juror do you intend to be? This is the question all collaborators must face and a choice all of them eventually must make. Eliot asks spectators whether you want to be a collaborator who wants to usher in new ways of experiencing and moving in the world *or* do you wish to be a collaborator who benefits from and thus helps maintain a "state of affairs" predicated on violence and injustice.⁵⁶ Eliot tempers his call for collective spectator involvement with a call for individual spectator responsibility. Spectators are called on to not only collaborate, but to disruptively question the status quo. Eliot again demonstrates his interest not only in what experiences spectators share but also in the ways that each individual participates in and helps cobble together what is shared with others. *Murder* addresses the relationship between individual ethical action and collaborative,

⁵⁵ The point is less that the "State" has fully subordinated "the pretensions of the Church" as opposed to other institutions than the violent subordination of any and all persons, communities, or cultural institutions that have the audacity to challenge governmental power. As Ashley Dukes stated in his "T. S. Eliot in the Theatre," much in the play "conspired to remind us of the play's actuality; indeed it was never allowed to become historical drama for a moment. Hitler had been long enough in power to ensure that the four knightly murderers of Becket would be recognized as figures of the day, four perfect Nazis defending their act on the most orthodox totalitarian grounds. Echoes of one war and forebodings of another resounded through the sultry afternoon [of the first performance]" (114-115).

⁵⁶ Earlier in his defense, Hugh de Morville links violence to expedient "social justice," stating, "Unhappily, there are times when violence is the only way in which social justice can be secured" (217).

communal action through jurorship. Jurorship makes one collaborate with others and build consensus while also requiring one to bring her representative judgment to an ethical problem.⁵⁷ Eliot therefore depicts two sorts of collaboration: (1) one charged with making spectators aware of their own alienation and perhaps inspiring them to “generate greater self-awareness and the ethical responsibility that attends it” (Mahaffey and Shashaty 8), and (2) another that focuses instead upon how their “approv[al]” of this “state of affairs” has made them equally complicit in any action that maintains, supports, or furthers said “state.”⁵⁸ The question, then, he poses to spectators is a simple: to whose rhythm do you want to move?

Eliot’s casting of spectators as jurors remains telling because to be selected to serve as a juror, while often depicted as an unpleasant hassle and impingement on one’s schedule, denotes that one is seen as being a stakeholder in a community.⁵⁹ One serves, ideally, as jurist of one’s *peers*, not for those with whom one has no common bond. Serving as a juror can also be a difficult, if not harrowing experience, especially if one serves as a jurist for a murder trial or

⁵⁷ Eliot indicates that the most important aspect of collaboration is not simply the decision to collaborate but the decision with whom and by what means one will collaborate. Eliot, then, suggests a possible relationship between complicity and collaboration a full five years before Marshall Pétain’s Vichy France was charged with collaborating with Nazi Germany to further its own interests. See Robert O. Paxton’s *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (Columbia UP, 2001) for a full account of Vichy France and collaboration. As Paxton pithily states, despite Pétain’s hopes, “In the end, ‘Kollaboration’ [to Hitler in 1940] meant only booty, a cheap way to get the French to keep their own people quiet, and an eventual peace of revenge” (52, emphasis mine). This keeping one’s citizens quiet, docile, orderly, and, above all, passive observers *of* instead of active participants *in* the sociopolitical and historical moment of which they are a part seems very similar to the “state of affairs” Eliot denigrates in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

⁵⁸ Mahaffey and Shashaty are referencing James Joyce’s *Dubliners* in their essay, but their point that the stories of *Dubliners* “present us with a set of problems designed to stimulate and mediate a dialogue with the reader, and the subject of that dialogue is how the unconscious minds of individuals may collaborate to confirm—and thereby perpetuate—their own helplessness” (4-5) remains nonetheless largely applicable to Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*.

⁵⁹ It must be noted that prior to the expansion of the jury franchise in 1972, jurors had to be owners of property above a certain value. As Patrick, Lord Devlin states in his *Trial by Jury* (1956), this meant that juries were “predominantly male, middle-aged, middle-minded, and middle class” and thus “not really representative of the nation as a whole” (Devlin 20). See also S. H. Bailey & M. J. Gunn’s discussion of the 1932 Derbyshire jury for the mass trespass at Kinder Scout trial in their *On the Modern English Legal System* (1996): 891ff.

violent crime trial.⁶⁰ Even in less grisly cases, one need only consider “the emotional impact of distressing evidence, the strain of giving the verdict, the tedium of frequent delays and periods of inactivity” to appreciate the difficulties of serving as a juror (Lloyd-Bostock & Thomas 28). Jurors, as individuals and as a collective jury, must also act as “a buffer between legal rules and communal norms and values, and [are] empowered to mitigate the harshness of the law”; their role is that of a “factfinder...[who] judge[s] a case based on information presented at the trial, rather than on prejudices or biases [he or she] bring[s] into the courtroom” (Diamond, Casper, Ostergren 247). To be a juror, then, means that one is *a part of* while also being *apart from* a wider sociopolitical body; while I do not wish to cast jurors as inhabitants of some sort of jurisprudential liminal space, it does seem noteworthy to consider how jurors must oscillate between two radically different social roles, sets of expectations, and patterns of behavior. Jurors also possess complete and final say on guilt and innocence, their verdicts being “based on conscience, [whether] against the letter of the law, and occasionally in defiance of government” (Lloyd-Bostock & Thomas 40).⁶¹ Jurors, then, have the power to upend the status quo, remaining only answerable to, in Lord Mansfield’s lament following *R. v. Shipley* (1784), “God and their own consciences” (824).⁶² Jury service carries with it the potentiality to remake certain aspects of the legal framework and thus certain sectors of society as a whole.

⁶⁰ The long-term psychological effects such cases have on jurors has only recently been receiving attention. Since the 1995 Rosemary West murder case, jurors have had access to “court-appointed welfare officers...to speak to jurors at their own request” as well as providing jurors with “use of a free telephone help-line and the opportunity to consult family doctors or come together for a group session with the [Lord Chancellor’s] Department’s own welfare officers” (Lloyd-Bostock & Thomas 28).

⁶¹ Sentences, of course, are passed by the presiding judge and may run contrary to the jury’s recommendations; the verdict, however, is not altered by a sentence. A guilty verdict can be undermined by a suspended or reduced sentence under rare circumstances.

⁶² Mansfield decried the practice of jury nullification, whereby the jury acquits a party whom they believe to be guilty. This can occur for a number of reasons: perceiving injustice of the law itself *or* an unjust application of a given

A juror, simple put, has her work cut out for her. Performing the role of a juror, as a result, would preclude almost any sort of audience passivity. An inattentive, disengaged, or apathetic juror would, in short, be an unfit juror.⁶³ Eliot's idea of spectatorship centers on attentiveness and creating conditions that prompt spectators to work through the argumentative and affective force of the Knights' *apologias*.⁶⁴ As Rancière argued in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), attentiveness is akin to an "endless revolving around the truth...[so that people can] find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others" (72). Furthermore, Eliot's casting spectators as jurors results in a hitherto anonymous, uninvolved body (the audience) becoming transformed into collaborators capable of forging "a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in" (Rancière 23). Eliot, in a move that resembles Auden's *The Dance of Death*, presses spectators to pay attention to the production in order to gain "a better understanding" while also implicitly prompting them to collaborate and "change something of the world" by working together as a dissensual body.

This powerful potential to "change something of the world we live in" is nullified if collaboration does not occur amongst the jurors. Twelve attentive jurors remain

law, or because of an existing prejudice or bias. Repeated jury nullification may serve as an indicator of an unwanted piece of legislation, thus serving as a *de facto* invalidation of said legislation or statute. Such a statute, to use the lexicon of this chapter, is "out of time" with the society it is supposed to regulate. An important example of this would be Lysander Spooner's abolitionist pamphlet, *An Essay on the Trial by Jury* (1852), which advocated using jury nullification to fight the *Fugitive Slave Act* (1850).

⁶³ Inattentiveness – and even appearing inattentive – has often been used to dismiss jurors; e.g. *United States v. Allen*, 666 F. Supp. 847, 851; *People v. Daniels*, 517 N.E. 2d 626, 627; *State v. Jackson*, 548 So. 2d 29, 33-34; *United States v. Hendrieth*, 922 F.2d 748, 749; *United States v. Garrison*, 849 F.2d 748, 749; *State v. Brown*, 522 So. 2d 1110, 1114.

⁶⁴ I am dubbing the Knights' speeches as *apologias* because they seem to go beyond the bounds of a simple defense argument; instead, they serve as justifications for not only their actions, but their views of governmental and ecclesiastical authority, social justice, and what constitutes the *best* or *right* society.

jurisprudentially useless if no sort of unanimous verdict can be reached.⁶⁵ Furthermore, jury service generally requires no small amount of striving towards consensus; jury service oftentimes requires the development of a shared understanding of evidence, not to mention a shared emotional and intellectual state from which a unanimous decision can arise.⁶⁶ Eliot, then, *intensifies* the sort of audience collaboration found in other modernist dramas. The dramas previously discussed in this study focused on having spectators collaborate *with* the production. *Murder in the Cathedral*, however, urges spectators to consider also the need for collaborating *with one another*. Just as spectators must work together to find “the drum” that has been lost or work together to create a new one, Eliot suggests that a good first step in doing so is to learn how to make rational decisions as a collective. It is one thing to be a collaborator when there is a script mediating or shaping your actions and responses to the performance, it is quite another to be granted the freedom and responsibility to collaborate *sans* script. This not only demonstrates the trust Eliot places in spectators but also the firmness of his belief that we can – and must – determine what it means to be “in time” with one another. An inability to find a shared rhythm for ourselves, Eliot suggests, not only damns our collaborative endeavors but impinges upon our ability to resist and challenge the current “state of affairs.”

The very notion of being a juror and working with one’s fellow jurors towards a verdict implies that one faces a decision, problem, or quandary that goes beyond the purview and scope of any individual’s decision-making abilities. Although each individual juror must

⁶⁵ Prior to the passage of the *Criminal Justice Act 1967*, courts required unanimous verdicts from juries. §13 of the act removed this requirement and allowed majority verdicts. When Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral*, courts could only recognize unanimous verdicts.

⁶⁶ See Sprain & Gastil’s “What Does it Mean to Deliberate?: An Interpretative Account of Jurors’ Expressed Deliberative Rules and Premises” (2013) for an account of the varied deliberative rules, premises, and preferences jurors possess as well as the ways in which emotions help to reinforce certain deliberative norms.

exercise his or her representative judgment, a verdict requires unanimity in order for it to be recognized as valid. One must therefore work with one's peers – many of them likely to be complete strangers – and from this work will issue a resolution, in part or in whole, for the conflict in question.⁶⁷ Granted, the performance never requests that the spectators deliver a verdict, as the play ends after a brief dialogue between two priests and a lamentation from the chorus of Canterbury women, but could one not consider the varied conversations following the performance's end as collaborative acts – whether it be those occurring as one leaves the theatre, on the walk or ride home, over post-show drinks or dinner, or discussions that occur long after the curtain's falling and long after the immediate affective responses to the performance have tempered or ebbed? Are these nothing short of collaboration? To say no to this query would hint that Eliot's art revolves around the reaching of a final verdict and a closing off of dialogue.⁶⁸ To say yes would equally require that collaboration be seen as a process instead of a singular act with a definitive end and would also affirm the implicit relationship between collaboration and community so present in Eliot's *oeuvre*.⁶⁹

Eliot's idea of community is that which asks a subject "to alter himself" and, through this alteration, creates a "spasm in the continuity of the subject" (Esposito 7).⁷⁰ While Eliot often

⁶⁷ Laurence Tribe, in "Trial by Mathematics: Precision and Ritual in the Legal Process" (1971), argues that trial proceedings are a "complex pattern of gestures...[part of a larger] ritual of conflict settlement" (1377), hence my usage of the terms resolution and conflict. The connection between ritual, collaboration, and community that interests Eliot in *Sweeney Agonistes* reappears, albeit in a very different form, in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

⁶⁸ One should remember that jury decisions remain open to appeal and exist as part of a legal framework – whether one speaks of English Common Law or United States' Constitutional Law – that is by its very definition mutable and subject to continual revision. Jury decisions, while binding, are rarely in and of themselves *final*.

⁶⁹ It should be remembered that Eliot, while not overtly political in *Sweeney* or *Murder*, was writing in a time when political agency and suffrage was being radically expanded and altered in England. Citizens were able to vote and become more active stakeholders in their community in ways that had previously been impossible. Greater involvement in the community and body politic is not a final event, but a constant process of which one is a part.

⁷⁰ Eliot seems to also be advocating something akin to what Victor Turner, in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (1969), describes as *spontaneous communitas*: "an inward experience...[that] spell[s] out the optimal social

speaks of the search for something common or shared that can create a sense of strong social stability, this does not mean that Eliot simply views community as a shared common attribute. Per my earlier discussion of the fluidity and mutability of rhythm and ritual, community need not denote something static. Community instead is fluidity on a collective level; just as drama is a genre where different – and often disagreeing – voices come together, community represents a coming together of oftentimes radically different people who may share precious little but have agreed upon a similar rhythm of life. Rhythms shift, communities change; what matters for Eliot is that a rhythm of some sort exists and that this rhythm infuses life with something to challenge the alienation and fragmentation of interwar, modern life. Eliot, anticipating Esposito's much later views on community, castigates he who is unwilling to confront "what he is not, with his 'nothing'" because such a refusal forecloses the possibility of something shared ever occurring (8). The closing moments of *Murder in the Cathedral* casts aspersion upon this unwillingness:

...we acknowledge ourselves as type of the
common man,
Of men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire:
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of
God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
Who fear the injustice of men less than the injustice of God;
Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the

conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply....it is [however] the fate of all spontaneous *communitas* in history to undergo what most people see as a 'decline and fall' into structure and law" (132). Turner continues, stating: "structure tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly; while *communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideals" (133).

fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,

Less than we fear the love of God (*CPP* 221).

Although this passage expresses a subject's "what he is not" and the "debt, a pledge, a gift to be given, ... that therefore will establish a lack" in the subject squarely in religious terminology, the location and vehicle of this "debt" matter less than the import Eliot gives to this debt, pledge, gift, and lack. As "Religion and Literature" (1935) illustrates, Eliot valued religion because of its ability to combat the worldview that encourages people "to get what they can out of life while it lasts, to miss no 'experience' that presents itself, and to sacrifice themselves, if they make any sacrifice at all, only for the sake of tangible benefits to others in this world either now or in the future" (*SP* 106).⁷¹ Religion, then, as a participatory ritual, serves as a foil to the rampant individualism and consumerism he saw plaguing interwar society.⁷² As Eliot argued in "The Aims of Education" (1950-1951): "One becomes responsible not by having tasks imposed which one cannot escape; for an individual to be truly responsible he must be free to shirk his responsibilities" (71). The responsible individual, in turn, not only acknowledges the duties, pledges, requests, and needs of others but allows these things to permeate into her very being,

⁷¹ In "Religion and Literature," Eliot also markedly disavowed any sort of proselytizing in literature, comparing such texts to propaganda (99-100). Eliot continued, remarking that "it is the literature which we read with the least effort that can have the easiest and most insidious influence upon us" because such texts foster readerly passivity (103); it is in combatting this readerly passivity that religion, as a worldview that challenges the *status quo*, gains much of its meaning and import for Eliot (103).

⁷²Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) furthers this point by its stating its interest not in discussing "the means for bringing a Christian society into existence...[but of] making clear its differences from the kind of society in which we are now living" and "consider[ing] the idea in relation to particular existing societies" (5, 48). What Eliot rarely considers, however, is the manner which orthodoxy can be a constraining force as well as a stabilizing force. Eliot elides this question by not focusing on "the means for bringing [such a society] into existence," but the issue of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in both ritual and religion remains regardless of Eliot's inattention.

to *feel* and *contemplate* said debts, pledges, requests, and needs.⁷³ While *Sweeney Agonistes* presents to audiences “a society which uses words instead of thoughts and feelings” and the devastating effects of this lack of contemplative feeling, *Murder in the Cathedral* presents a society recognizing the need for “thoughts and feelings” whilst nonetheless remaining frustrated in their attempts to regain them (Eliot 1934: 628).⁷⁴

In the closing moments of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot demonstrates how subjects willingly construct barriers to collaboration. Whether speaking of one who “shut[s] the door and sit[s] by the fire” and thus willingly shuts herself off from the world or one who moves through the world but yet “fear[s] the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the/ fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,” the words of Hugh de Morville loom large: “We have served your interests; we merit your applause; and if there is any guilt whatever in the matter, you must share it with us.” Eliot locates the complicity in the “we” of the audience.⁷⁵ *Murder in the Cathedral* demonstrates how spectators who reap the benefits of “the state of affairs” (217) brought about by Becket’s murder must also share “any guilt [that is] in the matter” (218) with the knights.⁷⁶ Spectators are no freer from blame than the assassins; in some respects, Eliot would argue that spectators’ lack of awareness of their own culpability is worse. Instead of

⁷³ The importance of developing both a feeling and a contemplative mind can be seen in a variety of other Eliot’s poems, including *The Waste Land*, “The Hollow Men,” and *The Four Quartets*. Having a shared rhythm, Eliot suggests, means that we are all responsible for “keeping time” as best as we can.

⁷⁴ Even Eliot’s attempts to articulate a Christian community had collaboration at its core, as he spoke of how in such a society there “would always remain a dual allegiance.... There would always be a tension; and this tension is essential to the idea of a Christian society” (1940, 56). Collaboration is thus seen as a recognizing of and an attempt to work through the varied points of “tension” that one faces. The difficulty consists in finding what frustrates collaboration without cutting through the productive “tension.”

⁷⁵ This differs from Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6*, which showed the complicity of characters who accept the *status quo* and fail to strive for any sort of shared, communal experience that could challenge the structures of dominance. *The Ascent of F6* demonstrated the complicity of Mr. and Mrs. A and Michael Ransom in failing to recognize or capitalize upon opportunities to effect change.

realizing their culpability in the matter, twentieth-century spectators have, as *The Rock* states, been

Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
Engaged in working out a rational morality,
Engaged in printing as many books as possible,
Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,
Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm
For nation or race or what you call humanity (*CPP* 104).

Spectators live in a world where people are not “Engaged” with other people but are instead engaged with their own comfort, sense of self, and interests. Spectators, Eliot would argue, have inured themselves against any sense of commonality or community.

Murder in the Cathedral suggests that spectators help create and abet the structures of *unfeelingness*, structures built upon empty “words instead of thoughts and feelings” (Eliot 1934: 628).⁷⁷ These empty, vacuous words do not provide any sort of “critical analysis of a problematic reality” (Freire 168) nor do they move spectators to pose a question as simple and penetrating as Esposito’s: “How are we to break down the wall of the individual while at the same time saving the singular gift that [each] individual carries?” (19). According to Eliot, spectators themselves build, brick by brick, this “wall of the individual” that forecloses the very sort of analysis, self-awareness, and responsibility that would allow us to find ways of being “in

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) states that “structures of feeling” are rooted “not [in] feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling” that form “a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once *interlocking and in tension*” (132, emphases mine). The very sort of relationship between thought and feeling, their interlocking nature, and the manner that they struggle with one another remains the very sort of relationship that Eliot sees as not existing in a world full of collaborative complicity, hence my dubbing them *structures of unfeelingness*.

time” with one another. Each day spectators “approve” of and benefit from the current “state of affairs,” this wall grows higher.

For Eliot, spectators can be complicit collaborators, collaborators who work to prevent more generative, restorative forms of collaboration from occurring. Although Eliot’s casting of spectators as jurors provided a way of circumventing this “wall,” it must be remembered that jurors can also uphold the status quo. *Murder in the Cathedral* implies that a juror can tacitly refuse the responsibility of the role given to her. As discussed previously, jurors are charged with the power not only to mediate between the law and the community at large, but also possess the power to alter said laws and communities in meaningful ways. Furthermore, jurors also indicate the power of everyday people, their power to effect change and call into question structure of dominance and point out structures of unfeelingness.⁷⁸ What remains to be considered, though, is how a juror can refuse or not realize the full potential of her sociopolitical and legal role. A poorly played part is, after all, a risk all performances run. A juror can remain silent, refuse to participate in the general discussion, remain ignorant instead of posing questions to the judge, ignore the obligations she has to share her thoughts with fellow jurors, or simply be a passenger instead of an active participant in the deliberations.⁷⁹ A juror, in short, can uphold the status quo by being quietly complicit instead of redressing wrongs.⁸⁰ A juror

⁷⁸ In this respect, jurors in part illustrate what Rancière, in *Disagreement* (1999) terms as “the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” (30). While one could very well see a jury as part of what Rancière terms as the “police” and “police order,” it must be remembered that juries have the potential to inject something emancipatory into a political framework, to point out what Rancière terms a “wrong” (cf. *Disagreement* 21-42 for a discussion of the relation between *wrong* and *police* in Rancière).

⁷⁹ Jurors in Great Britain are allowed to pose questions to the judge via a written note passed to a court official.

⁸⁰ Regardless of whether one actively refuses to make the *status quo* more equitable or in her disinterest simply gives inequality a free pass, the end is the same: the current “state of affairs,” complete with all its faults, remains the same.

who does not listen to others or does not share her thoughts and feelings with others is a juror in name only. She remains nothing more than an overly passive spectator.

Eliot saw a sense of community and the shared, oftentimes ritualistic, experience that brings it into being as something that occurs not when people simply share a common background or a set of beliefs, but something that occurs when people collaboratively address or realize a problem, issue, or responsibility facing them.⁸¹ It is not quite enough for collaborators to realize that any one person's intellect or any single point-of-view is always already limited; it is equally not quite enough to realize the value of a peer-reviewed, vetted, decision that has, to the best of its ability, worked through all the evidence provided. For Eliot, the value and necessity of certain forms of collaboration reside in how said forms can foster a greater understanding of what people owe one another and how these obligations have the potential to alter not only themselves but the "state of affairs" as a whole.

Instead of seeing community as a group of disparate subjects united by a commonly held value or characteristic, *Murder* portrays community as a group of subjects "united by an 'obligation'" (Esposito 6).⁸² Eliot sees a greater communal stability as being rooted in recognizing and responding faithfully to this obligation.⁸³ The fact that *Murder in the Cathedral* largely locates this obligation in Christianity remains outside the scope of this argument.

⁸¹ Eliot's positioning of spectators as jurors illustrates the insufficiency and inadequacy of any single intellectual or emotive standpoint when it comes to community formation: the complexity and novelty of the problems and experiments spectators, performers, and playwrights face remain so daunting that no one person or group of people can engage with them effectively. The situation instead requires realizing the value and necessity of certain forms of collaboration

⁸² In many respects, *Sweeney* portrays characters who refuse to recognize or cannot recognize such obligations.

⁸³ This is reminiscent of Badiou's notion of ethical subjectivity: one experiences an event, nominates it as such, is faithful to it, continually working through its consequences and import, bringing it into the wider world, and by virtue of that faithfulness a process of subjectivization is triggered. See *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Verso, 2002).

Instead, what matters is that Eliot places spectators in a relationship of obligation – that of jurors – with the hope that spectators will respond adequately to the situation.⁸⁴ As Andrew E.

Taslitz argues:

the mere act of joint gazing [at the state and its agents] bonds the jurors together as an entity, not as a mere aggregate of individuals....the act of deliberating that airs different perspectives and fuses jurors into a single, well-informed body distinct from its constituent members....jurors who deliberate in criminal cases return to their communities changed, seeing themselves less as individuals and more as *active* members of a political community (1678).

The “act of deliberating” requires one to provide one’s own thoughts and feelings, making them public knowledge, able to be contested, and capable of being interacted with by others. It is this single “act,” this sacrifice and risk made by jurors, that allows something “distinct” to arise.

This new and distinct “body” lives but for a short time and for a set purpose, but its ability to effect true sociopolitical, historical, and ethical change has the potential to have a much longer, much more expansive lifespan. For Eliot, placing spectators in situations that incline them to become more “*active* members” in their communities once they are free from the jury box is nothing short of the *raison d’être* of his drama. The attainment of this “*active* member[ship]” and the creation of environments that foster it should be seen as vital a part of Eliot’s dramaturgy as his desire to place his verse dramas on equal footing with commercial, realist prose dramas.

III. Concluding Remarks

⁸⁴ See notes 84-85

Eliot's "The Beating of a Drum," written over a decade prior to *Murder in the Cathedral*, bluntly laments how "we have lost the drum" (12). This drum, however, denoting an instrument for expressing the rhythms and rituals that we share, remains something spectators must rediscover or make anew. The drum, then, represents *the* challenge that Eliot issues to spectators. *Sweeney Agonistes* hints that we can recover the drum by finding rituals that people can share and participate in, rhythms that are "in time" with our own historical moment and our needs as a community. *Murder in the Cathedral* supplements *Sweeney Agonistes* and its call for recovering shared rituals by illustrating the need to recover this drum collaboratively, demonstrating that it is only through collaboration that we determine what it means to be "in time" with one another. Collaboration, the learning how to be "in time" with others, reminds us of the need for equal attentiveness to our individual differences as well as our shared communal obligations to one another; such openness and attentiveness, Eliot suggests, may serve as the first beat of a newfound drum. All told, the value and import of collaboration as well as the multiple means of collaborating – whether one advocates for shared experiences or frustrates the development of such experiences – remains integral to Eliotic dramaturgy and his notion of audience.

Shared, communal experiences represent a panacea for Eliot, something capable of combatting the rampant selfishness and consumerism that he viewed as destroying people's ability to enter into meaningful relationships. Granted, one could most definitely argue that Eliot does not consider fully the manner that shared experiences calcify into normativity and that Eliot's notion of community in the interwar years oftentimes veered unnecessarily into exclusivity and normativity. Texts such as *After Strange Gods* (1934), *The Idea of a Christian Society*

(1939), and a number of his commentaries in *Criterion* serve as representatives of this unfortunate, exclusive normativity. Despite these shortcomings, what remains is a timely intervention into interwar life and thought; Eliot hoped to place a fragmented society in flux upon a more stable foundation, one that attempts to avoid the mistakes and excesses of both totalitarianism and liberalism.⁸⁵ The aesthetic and political import of such an intervention, regardless of its measure of success, must be recognized; as Auden said: “not every experiment will be a success; that should be neither expected nor desired, for much is learned from failure...[because] avenues of development may be opened out, which would not otherwise have been noticed ” (*Plays* 498). Eliot’s interwar dramas attempted to provide coherent solutions to complex social, political, and ethical problems. Also, in his attempt to find new rhythms and registers of feeling and thinking, Eliot dedicated his interwar dramas to assiduous experimentation, prompting spectators to engage with the production – and with one another – in exciting, novel, and challenging ways.⁸⁶

Whether as a participant in a shared, ritualistic experience or as a juror deliberating with fellow jurists, Eliot encourages spectators to cobble together new emotive and intellectual responses to the production. These new responses may in turn serve as the foundation for new sorts of communities, whether they be creative communities, political communities, philosophical communities, or communities of faith. The important thing is less the *type* of

⁸⁵ See *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), 12ff for Eliot’s warnings about the excesses of both fascism and the “financial oligarchy” (13) created by liberalism. In totalitarian governments, Eliot sees individual freedoms as trampled underfoot by the collective will, whereas in liberal societies, the “natural collective consciousness [has dissolved] into individual constituents” (13).

⁸⁶ I would not, however, make the same claim about Eliot’s postwar dramas. While these dramas do inject a strangeness and unreality into domestic drawing-room drama, they do not operate the same as his interwar dramas. Instead of engaging the spectator in deliberate ways through dramatic form, the engagement is less obvious. The device, so to speak, is more veiled than bared.

community than what knits it together: an understanding and acceptance of one's own limitations, the obligations one has to others, and an awareness that community is that which "constitutes us without belonging to us" (Esposito 134). Such an acceptance, Eliot suggests, can keep the drum beating, and beating loudly, for quite some time.

Despite their import, the "avenues of development" afforded by Eliot's interwar dramas have, however, long been ignored. The primary goal of this chapter, then, has been to encourage further critical examination of how these avenues have "opened out" into the world. Once "opened out," a better understanding of where Eliot wanted audiences, performers, and productions of his dramas to travel towards can be grasped. What this chapter has illustrated is less the need for spectators, performers, and productions to realize *where* they are going and more the need to realize the import of attempting to go there, wherever *there* may be, together.

4. John Arden and the Theatre of Not Enough

...the audience is expecting to be told *everything*. Somehow I have not managed to balance the business of giving the audience information so that they can understand the play with the business of withholding information in order to keep the tension going.

-John Arden, interview with Walter Wager, 1966

It has become something of a commonplace to refer to John Arden as Britain's Bertolt Brecht, given his early work with the Royal Court Theatre and the later community theatre work he did with his wife and collaborator, the Irish playwright Margareta D'Arcy.¹ The Royal Court Theatre put on four of Arden's early plays – *The Waters of Babylon* (1957), *Live Like Pigs* (1958), *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), and *The Happy Haven* (1960) – all of which received either a lukewarm or outright hostile response from the majority of the critical community. After this, Arden began to write longer, more complex plays, including the *The Workhouse Donkey* (1962) and, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* (1963), which premiered at the 1963 Chichester Festival and the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre in May 1964, respectively. After *Left-Handed Liberty* (1970), his commission from the City of London to mark the 750th anniversary of the Magna Carta, Arden began to collaborate almost exclusively with D'Arcy, the only notable exceptions being his novels, short stories, and his highly regarded radio play, *Pearl* (1978).

¹ For some recent instances of Arden being dubbed the British Brecht, see John Calder's obituary of Arden in *The Independent*, 2 April 2012, Michael Coveney's obituary in *The Guardian* on 30 March 2012, and Nicholas Wroe's career retrospective, "Britain's Brecht," in the 2 January 2004 edition of *The Guardian*. Also, see Susan Bennett's "Brecht-Britain-Bakhtin: The Bridge of *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*" in *John Arden and Margareta d'Arcy: A Casebook*, ed. Jonathan Wike (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 67-80 as well as Martin Esslin's "Brecht and the English Theatre," (1966) which states that the "truest follower of Brecht – or at least Brecht's essential attitude – is undoubtedly John Arden....It is more a case of kindred poetical talents following common models in a more distant tradition" (70). See chapter 2 for the ways that Brechtian epic theatre differs from interwar collaborative and interventional dramas.

Arden is often compared with Brecht because of his notion that the theatre exists “to stimulate change for the better” in the minds and lives of its spectators (1991, 167), a statement eerily similar to Benjamin’s assessment of how Brechtian drama “tests [spectators] to determine their capacity for change” (2003, 33). Instead of focusing on the similarities between Brecht and Arden, this chapter argues instead is that he might just as well be considered the heir to the interwar theatre of audience collaboration and intervention. For Arden, “stimulat[ing] change” denoted a process where spectators had to come to terms with not being “told *everything*” while still responding productively to the performance, while still taking meaning from and making meaning with the events onstage. Unlike Brecht, Arden focuses upon the need to consider with whom and by what means one collaborates or intervenes, focusing upon the methodology that underwrites and substantiates these acts.² This chapters sees Arden as a postwar respondent to the interwar avant-garde and fringe theatre because what his audiences oftentimes receive does not “provide the theatrical reward” hoped for – “What remains—the dialogue of waiting, accusation, and revelation—is not enough” (Bruster 46). What this chapter examines is how this theatre of “not enough” challenges audiences to respond in ways similar to the dramas previously mentioned in this study. This chapter thus demonstrates the ways Arden mounts this challenge by showing (1) how *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* provides what *cannot* constitute an act of solidarity, remaining silent as to what can constitute such an act and (2) by prompting

² As Alan Riding argues in *And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris* (2010), collaboration was oftentimes linked with supporting the status quo in occupied France: “[the] Germans’ priority...was simply to make Parisians feel that life was returning to normal....For Goebbels, cultural collaboration meant distracting the public at large and impressing French artists and intellectuals with Germany’s eternal glory and the achievements of the Third Reich” (51).

spectators to adjudicate whether Lindsay could have taken a different course of action in *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* without providing them any guidance on how to respond.

Arden remains concerned with watching spectatorial responses to this “not enough” while also prompting spectators to watch for their own and others’ responses to this “not enough. Arden however, elicits responses from his spectators in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of current dialogic modes to the problems that his dramas pose while also implicitly challenging them to create new modes of dialogue. Much like Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6*, his plays do not treat the theatre as an arena to solve political conundrums but instead see the theatre as a venue for demonstrating that existing notions of solidarity, collaboration, and activism have precious little purchase. The question at the end of the drama is less “when and how should we collaborate towards a given social or political end” and more a question of what the words solidarity, collaboration, and activism actually signify in the immediate postwar and Cold War eras. As Paul W. Day states, some of the central questions Arden asks in his early dramas are “What solidarity has the social unit today? Is there no way to retain vitality and individuality in the citizen, while keeping order at the same time? (1975, 246). While Arden is not foolhardy enough to re-define these terms, he nonetheless demonstrates what *cannot* constitute an act of solidarity, collaboration, or activism. After all, Arden continues to view the theatre as a venue that cannot “stimulate anything except pleasure” although it is a communicative medium that sometimes “does stimulate change for the better” (1991, 167). Following Arden’s dramatizations of failure, it is little surprise that instances like his presentation of “questions he cannot begin to answer” to spectators can be

found throughout his *oeuvre*.³ In response to the feeling of “not enough” experienced by many spectators, Arden implies that not providing enough is rather the entire point. As John Russell Brown argues in *Theatre Language* (1972), Arden’s dramas “illustrate attitudes and explore a problem,” being “committed only to an attempt to understand” rather than a programmatic set of solutions (194, 209).

Arden continually had to say that he did not approve of or side with his characters; for example, in the introduction to *Live Like Pigs* he states that he was “accused by the Left of attacking the Welfare State: on the other, the play was *hailed* as a defense of anarchy and amorality. So perhaps I better declare myself. I approve outright neither of the Sawneys nor of the Jacksons” (P1 119). Additionally, in the preface to the 1960 Grove Press edition of *Musgrave*, Arden stated that the play “does [not] advocate bloody revolution. I have endeavored to write about the violence that is so evident in the world” (7). It is important to remember that even amongst Royal Court playwrights, Arden was something of a *rara avis* because of his general distance from kitchen sink realism as well as his disinterest in valorizing certain characters (or types of characters) in his plays. Much as the case was with Yeats, Arden was interested in the oscillation between two parties/positions rather than the subsumption or subordination of one to the other. Arden, by enjoining spectators to “read the varieties of dishonor, and determine in your mind how best ye can avoid whilk ane of them, and when,” prompts them to begin

³ Ann Messenger sees this dialectic between accepting the need to make a hard decision and the inability to find said decision as acceptable in the least as one of *the* central themes running throughout Arden’s work. Arden continually dramatizes these difficult situations, prompting the audience to come to terms with them. As Messenger states, speaking of *The Business of Good Government*: “in order to preserve good government, the only possible path to goodwill and great joy, Herod orders the slaughter of the Innocents, knowing full well that he is putting ‘a very particular mark’ against his name in the history books (p. 50). He accepts the tragic necessity ‘that the honour of one man should die for the good of the people’ (p. 50), just as he had accepted the necessity of the alliance with Rome” (309).

thinking of what political action and social responsibility ought to mean in the postwar era (P2 248).⁴

As the following readings of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* demonstrate, providing not quite enough oftentimes means providing spectators with all they can handle.

I. Not Enough Changes: Who's For a Re-evolution?

I'm skeptical about revolution itself; therefore, I'm skeptical about the revolutionary function of the theatre. But if the theater does not exist to stimulate change, then I don't think it's really something I'm interested in. A theatre that simply exists to pander to the complaisance in society is not interesting to me.

—John Arden, 1991

Until the political problem is solved, I doubt if we shall make much progress with the artistic one. Who's for a revolution?

—John Arden, 1966

In the first excerpt above, taken from an interview conducted by Georg Gaston in 1991 and later published in *Contemporary Literature*, Arden explains why he has “no faith in the theatre. I have no faith in the ability of writing to stimulate anything except pleasure. But sometimes...it does stimulate change for the better” (167). Arden, then, makes a keen separation between theatre's creating “change for the better” and theatre's fostering revolutionary change; at the same time, Arden links theatre's ability to give pleasure, and thus with its eliciting an

⁴ When quoting from *Armstrong* and *Musgrave*, I will refer to the versions of the plays as found in John Arden's *Plays 2* (Methuen, 2002) and *Plays 1* (Methuen, 2002) as P2 and P1, respectively, followed by the corresponding page number throughout this chapter. I will also refer to Arden and d'Arcy's *Plays: One* (Methuen, 1994) as P1A, followed by the corresponding page number.

emotional and intellectual response, with its ability to stimulate change.⁵ The business of theatre, Arden argues in *Theatre Ireland*, “is communication or it is nothing” (1993, 62); its business is not being the midwife to revolution. Arden argues that “revolutionary change...comes upon society almost by accident” and is therefore not something to which theatre can give birth by design. I state “by design” because the theatre is always pregnant, *per se*, with unknown and unknowable potentialities.

This is not to say that Arden disavows political statements in his dramas, given his view that “if we leave the control of our world to those who have already obtained that control, they will make quite sure that we never find out how they obtained it, what they plan to do with it, or even who they are” (1988, 20).⁶ This leaves the playwright, as the 1966 interview “Who’s for a Revolution?” illustrates, as one who becomes “by virtue of his craft, an instrument to interpret the feelings of a community” (1966, 53). It is impossible, Arden continues, “not to be a political or sociological playwright. Living together in society is a technical problem about which everybody should be concerned” (45). Arden, then, sees the business of theatre as engaging with this “technical problem” that everyone has a stake in; theatre must communicate and present situations that call out for change, situations that affect entire communities and thus require sustained, dedicated attention and complex, careful inquiry.

For Arden, the theatre serves as a venue for showing that not enough changes have been made in the British Isles. On the one hand, Britain remains mired in the past and continues to

⁵ Much like Wilde, who tweaks the Horatian dictum that art should delightfully instruct (cf. “Decay of Lying”), Arden seemingly argues that art delights because it challenges its spectators, readers, and hearers to re-think and re-attend to how the world in which they live is constructed.

⁶ Arden, whilst deeply political, is not a political playwright in the same vein as Brecht; as Arden said in a 1966 interview with Walter Wager: “I don’t copy Brecht; I don’t use him as a model....But I am very different from Brecht because Brecht was a practicing Marxist....I [however] use Marxism as just one of many sources. There is a certain amount of Marxist analysis in *Musgrave*, but it is by no means a Marxist play” (46).

replicate past failures instead of having learnt from them; on the other, Arden takes great pains to show *how* attempts at sociopolitical change have failed. It is little surprise, then, that Arden often sets his plays in the past to demonstrate how little things have changed or how not enough aspects of British society have changed. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is set in the 1880s, *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* is set in the late 1520s-1530, and the action of *Left-Handed Liberty* occurs in the 1210s.⁷ Despite being set in the present day, *The Waters of Babylon* (1956), *Live Like Pigs* (1958), and *The Workhouse Donkey* (1963) all portray an England somewhat foreign to London theatregoers, an England trapped to some degree in the past: the immigrant experience of *Waters*, the council housing squalor of *Pigs*, and the Yorkshire machine politics of *Donkey*. Just as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) reminds readers how history is a series of violent encounters and actions, a "nightmare from which I am trying to awake," Arden demonstrates both the difficulty and the necessity of waking up from historical mistakes (28).⁸

Instead of calling out for a revolution, then, Arden's plays reveal the need for a re-evolution. Re-evolution might sound like an odd term because evolution oftentimes is linked to a continuous, natural biological process and in that lexicon, to re-evolve seems nonsensical; however, my usage of the term focuses heavily on the prefix.⁹ In the course of this chapter, then, re-evolution must be understood as the restarting of an evolutionary process that has been

⁷ Many of Arden's collaborations with Margaretta D'Arcy were not set in the present: the Christmas pageant *The Business of Good Government* (1960); *The Royal Pardon* (1966), with its legendary temporality; *The Island of the Mighty* (1972), an Arthurian drama; *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* (1975), a 6-part cycle dramatizing the life of Socialist activist and Easter Rising participant James Connolly (1868-1916); and *Vandaleur's Folly* (1978), set in 1831-1833.

⁸ I cite from the 1986 corrected text, edited by Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986). Stephen Dedalus' famous quip about history counters the idea of the school headmaster, Mr. Deasy, that "human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (II, 377). Dedalus sees history, particularly Irish history, as being marked by violence and strife; additionally, Dedalus seeks to overcome his own history and his own past actions.

⁹ The Latin *ēvolūtiō* denotes an unfolding or an unrolling of a scroll; in short, it is a process of learning and encountering more. See Cicero's *de Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* 1.24, which uses *ēvolūtiō* in the discussion of a poet's development.

stopped. Re-evolution, then, focuses on the need to cut out what arrested its development in the first place and to start afresh. It is a beginning again with the commitment to neither replicate the errors of the past nor seek the immediacy of revolution. Re-evolution signifies something distinct from the gradual processes of reform or the immediacy of a revolution that “comes upon society almost by accident.”¹⁰ It denotes something more accelerated than the slow pace of reform yet more managed than the accidental onset of revolution.

Applying the term re-evolution to Arden allows one to accommodate his belief that “drama can at present only work, if at all, on the most modest scale” (1966, 53) while also keeping in mind his idea that spectators must “look at [the drama] all round and decide for themselves whether it is sound or not” because such an examination may “have some hope of affecting a change in somebody’s heart” (1961, 194-195). While the argument could be made that Arden advocates a more caring sort of spectatorship given how heart is often seen as the seat of the emotions, it seems more likely that Arden is speaking of the heart as a muscle that keeps humans alive through its constant, unfailing work. Much like how Rancière wishes for a revision of “the distribution of the sensible,” Arden seemingly hopes for a change in the way spectators work and live, in addition to a change in how they feel. Arden wishes to engender a sense of careful spectatorship – careful in the sense that one is aware of his limits as a spectator – as well as a committed spectatorship – committed in the sense that one is willing to continue forward despite not being “told everything” by the production. Spectators must reconcile the

¹⁰ It must be stated that *ēvolūtiō*, the unfolding or unrolling of a scroll, bears a family resemblance to *revolvere*, the root of revolt, which, in regards to reading, denotes the rolling back of a scroll to the start in order to read it. I wish less, however, to tease out the similarities between revolution and re-evolution than to demonstrate the unicity of Arden’s re-evolutionary approach.

difficult challenge to re-evolve with the fact that they've not been given much guidance as to how to do so.

As noted previously, Arden viewed the role of the playwright as that of an interpreter of the "feelings of a community." The remainder of this section examines the ways that Arden's theatre of "not enough" adroitly captures the restlessness and helplessness felt in postwar British society. Although the material lives of many had improved so much that Harold Macmillan could say "Most of our people have never had it so good," there was still something very much amiss in British society; people interested in social change wanted "something more than slogans" (Devine 2006, 25). While Arden's interview with Harriet Devine (the daughter of George Devine, pioneer of the Royal Court Theatre), makes it clear that he is referring to the "new world order" of George W. Bush, I doubt his thoughts would be different when discussing Macmillan, Douglas-Home, or Wilson. It was, after all, his sense of British political and martial misconduct regarding Cyprus that led to the composing of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*.

Arden's disdain for sloganeering masquerading as sociopolitical change manifests itself, then, in his refusal to provide easy answers to audiences. Instead of "pander[ing] to the complaisance in society" (1991, 167), Arden digs down to the root "feelings of [the] community" that feed said complaisance. Deeper than any feelings of *sic transit Gloria Britanniae* following the Suez Crisis, there existed a feeling of inability to deal with the changes afoot in society. Although between 1951 and 1964, "earnings.... increased by 110 per cent and the average standard of living rose, in real terms, by 30 per cent," all was not well, as this prosperity was concentrated in key areas (Lacey 2002, 10). Furthermore, as Lacey states, "Significant though

prosperity was, it did not herald the demise of systemic poverty. Indeed, poverty of a familiar and structural kind was 'rediscovered' on a large scale in the 1960s" (10). The myth of a unified, prosperous society began to fracture as it became increasingly clear that Britain had far from solved the major problems it had faced. Instead, it had merely coated them with a not-so-thin veneer of material goods and technological advancements. As François Bedarida states in *A Social History of England, 1851-1900* (2013), the social changes of the late 1950s "happened without warning....the country suddenly burst out in all directions" (249). Arden suggests that easy answers rarely prove sufficient and that tidy solutions can only do more damage in a country going in multiple directions at once. Social change, Arden implies, is oftentimes a modest, hard-won affair that addresses different parts of society in differing ways; change occurs not only when people merely collaborate but also when people contemplate the methodology and scope of their collaborations.

Arden's dramas, thus, provide hard truths about postwar Britain to its spectators, truths with which many spectators were unwilling to grapple. In the two sub-sections below, I examine Arden's treatment of these truths in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* and *Armstrong's Last Goodbye* as well as the audience's response to them. *Musgrave* exhibits the difficulties that accompany any attempt at solidarity whereas *Armstrong* shows the costs of re-evolution and presses spectators to determine whether those costs were worthwhile.

II. The Logical and Methodological in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, with Lindsay Anderson as director, on October 22, 1959.¹¹ *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* speaks of four deserters from an unstated colonial war who, because of a snowstorm, find themselves in an isolated northern English coal mining town caught in the middle of a strike. As the deserters – Hurst, Attercliffe, and Sparky, led by Musgrave – with their various supplies and artillery enter the town, the elite of the town think that the soldiers are still on active duty and are there to quell the strikers. Musgrave and his men, however, claim that they have arrived in town to recruit soldiers for the war and that the guns and other gear are merely there to impress and awe potential recruits. Their final day in town will be a giant fete in the town's market square with free drink and rousing speeches to inspire recruits to join, to make them believe, as the Parson says, that "when called to shoulder our country's burden, we should do it with a glancing eye and a leaping heart, to draw out the sword with gladness, thinking nothing of our petty differences but...showing a manly spirit" (P1 301). Arden adroitly captures "mid-Victorian society – dominated by money, but paying lip service to the graces of traditional rank and culture" while tacitly comparing it to his own historical moment (Day 1975, 242).

Musgrave has another aim in mind, however, which is to bring the violence of the colonial war to Britain, to show the people that it is "a colonial war that is a war of sin and unjust blood" (SMD 33). While the subversive message that Musgrave wants to deliver to the townspeople seems potentially transformative, his methods and the logic behind them are deeply, brutally flawed. His methods, as the text demonstrates, merely replicate the cycle of violence his men have hoped to escape; his contorted logic, in turn, remains too narrow a way of viewing the world that he and his men inhabit. As the play progresses, it is discovered that Musgrave and his men have *chosen* to visit this town because it is the hometown of a fellow

¹¹ Anderson went on to become co-artistic director of the Royal Court with William Gaskill and Anthony Page from 1969 to 1972. Anderson also went on to become leading figure in the British New Wave, directing films such as *This Sporting Life* (1963), *if...* (1968), and *In Celebration* (1975).

infantryman, Billy Hicks, who was killed in the war. After the speeches and the crowd has been sufficiently warmed up, the contents of one of the many boxes of gear:

...are jerked up to the cross-bar [of a street lamp-bracket] and reveal themselves as an articulated skeleton dressed up in a soldier's tunic and trousers, the rope is noosed round the neck. The PEOPLE draw back in horror. MUSGRAVE begins to dance, waving his rifle, his face contorted with demoniac fury (P1 306).

The skeleton on display belongs to Billy Hicks, who was killed by the “patriots abroad, anti-British, subversive” natives while walking home after curfew (308). After Hicks’s murder – he was “the third to be shot that week....the fifteenth that month,” the men were ordered to comb the town for his killers. This police action by the men devolved into violence, with 5 locals being killed (308). It was this action, and their later shock at having committed it, that prompted the men to desert. Musgrave, to atone for this atrocity, comes up with the following “logical” response:

One man, and for him five. Therefore, for five of them we multiply out, *and* we find it five-and-twenty So, as I understand Logic and Logic to me is the mechanisms of God – that means that today there’s twenty-five persons will have to be – (313).

Attercliffe, a dedicated pacifist who wishes to “turn [the people] against all wars,” is outraged by this plan, having thought all along that Musgrave’s “Logic” merely entailed reasoning with the townsfolk and showing them the errors of colonial wars (258).¹² Hurst, frenzied at the

¹² Stuart Hall correctly notes that the soldiers, until this moment, are “held together by the driving mania of their Serjeant, who has a deep religious vision about his Cause, which he pursues and is pursued by, almost to a point of fixed insanity” (1960, 50).

memory of the atrocity and desperate to atone for it, fully supports Musgrave's plan but wishes him to stop speechifying and to get on with the killing.¹³ Just as Hurst, disgusted with Musgrave's dithering, leaves Musgrave to his fate, dragoons come in and arrest Attercliffe and Musgrave for desertion and kill Hurst as he tries to escape.

The play closes with the two deserters in jail awaiting execution by hanging, with Musgrave unable to understand how his logic, given that he "had worked it out for months," ended up being flawed (323).¹⁴ Attercliffe responds to Musgrave's bewilderment, stating that trying to "end [warring] by its own rules: no blood good... You can't cure the pox by further whoring" (324). The play, however, ends with a moment of hope, as Attercliffe sings aloud and wonders:

Your blood-red rose is withered and gone

And fallen on the floor:

And he who brought the apple down

Shall be my darling dear.

For the apple holds a seed will grow

In live and lengthy joy

To raise a flourishing tree of fruit

For ever and a day.

With fal-la-la-the-dee, toor-a-ley,

¹³ Sparky was accidentally killed in Act II, Scene 3 during a struggle with Attercliffe and Hurst, who "*fall against SPARKY and all three crash to the floor. SPARKY gives a terrifying, choking cry [as he is accidentally stabbed with his own unsheathed bayonet]*" (P1 290).

¹⁴ Robert Skloot insightfully sees Musgrave's imprisonment and impending execution as working on two levels, with his execution occurring "because he represents too great a danger to the social order" and because his execution by "a hypocritical and vengeful society is the external verification of his own internal failure" (1975, 210). While the extent to which Musgrave *understands* his failure remains uncertain, he undoubtedly knows that he has failed utterly.

For ever and a day.

They're going to hang us up a length higher nor most apple-trees grow, Serjeant.

D'you reckon we can start an orchard? (325-326)

Attercliffe, in his pre-execution ruminations, ponders whether their failed attempt at social change may eventually bear fruit. Arden judiciously leaves this question unanswered, putting the onus on the audience as to whether the failed actions depicted on the stage may prompt further, more carefully constructed attempts at social change. Whereas the failed actions onstage provide a clear picture of what is "not enough" when it comes to sociopolitical change, the drama closes with the guarded hope that even the most abject failure can be learned from and built upon.

As can often be the case with daring work, *Musgrave* was panned by most critics and was a commercial failure, having "achieved only 25% at the box office" despite being "much admired within the Court" (Little and McLaughlin 2007, 56).¹⁵ The perplexity that greeted *Musgrave* might have had something to do with how it differed from other, more socially realist Royal Court productions. Arden, unlike Arnold Wesker or John Osborne, saw "the potential for a radical theatre that was significantly different from social realism" and was adamant that "his plays should not be subsumed within a notion of realism that was identified with contemporary naturalism" (Lacey 2002, 130). Harold Hobson, theatre reviewer of *The Sunday Times*, dubbed it

¹⁵ In comparison, N. F. Simpson's *One Way Pendulum*, which premiered in late 1959, "played to 87%" (Findlater 1981: 44). As Findlater's *At the Royal Court* (1981) states: "John Arden's three plays [at the Royal Court] were all box office disasters" (44). Differing accounts place the box office return of *Musgrave* at 25% or 21%; regardless of the precise figure, it was an utter flop, financially speaking. According to Terry Browne's audits of the Royal Court, for the plays whose full run occurred in the fiscal year ended 31 March, 1960, *Musgrave* was the only play to lose money for the Royal Court, having a production cost of £2,088 and £1,578 in box office takings, meaning that there was a loss of 24.5%. The production costs do not include overhead or running costs, making the overall loss likely a good deal higher (115); Browne trenchantly notes that *Musgrave* "made a loss greater than the Court's Arts Council grant for the whole year" (73). The 1965 revival, while not a sure-fire, did have higher box office takings; see Browne 121.

a “frightful ordeal. It is time someone reminded our advanced dramatists that the principal function of the theatre is to give pleasure.”¹⁶ Eric Keown of *Punch* simply asked “Why was this play put on?” while the unnamed reviewer from *The New Statesman* and T.C. Worsley of *The Financial Times* complained that the “talk bogged down in endless hesitation. The action, too, dragged repetitively” and “[the play] is at times aching slow,” respectively.¹⁷ Hilary Spurling, reviewing the 1965 revival at the Royal Court, stated, “Muddle runs through the whole play and by the end has reached truly startling proportions: Musgrave holds up the town at gunpoint in the market place. Why? What does he hope to gain by it?”¹⁸ As Marcus Tshudin states, the audiences were perplexed with *Musgrave* because Arden’s audiences “were still used to the traditional ‘message play’ or ‘Lehrstück’, which sets a problem and in the end proposes or, at least, points to a solution” (1972: 127).¹⁹ By the time of *Musgrave*, however, Arden had begun moving towards his notion that theatre “is communication or it is nothing” (1993, 62). As

¹⁶ Hobson’s vitriolic review prompted Albert Hunt to issue a response in *Encore*, “Serjeant Musgrave and the Critics” (1960), which accuses Hobson and his ilk of not recognizing “vital theatre” when they see it: “If the theatre is merely an entertaining scrawl in the margin of life, none of these things need concern us very much.... We still have *some* vital theatre left; for God’s sake let’s have some vital critics” (28).

¹⁷ Other critics complained of the pacing of the play and Anderson’s direction; examples of these include the reviewer of *The Times Educational Supplement*, Bernard Levin of *The Daily Express*, and J.C. Trewin of the *Birmingham Post*. Caryl Brahms in *Plays and Players* (December 1959) countered their arguments, defending Anderson’s direction. In short, Yael Zarhy-Levo’s comment in *The Making of Theatrical Reputations* (2008) proves true: “Overall, the critics responding to Arden’s plays were baffled” (123).

¹⁸ There were a few critics who praised the premier, including Philip Hope-Wallace in *The Manchester Guardian* and Alan Brien in *Spectator*. The production, however, which was scheduled to run for three and a half weeks, had received such overwhelmingly negative press that by the tenth night, Lindsay Anderson created a leaflet entitled “What Type of Theatre do You Want?” and distributed it throughout Soho, at universities, and in coffeehouses. The leaflet had 10 glowing recommendations on the play from literati and actors such as Doris Lessing, Cecil Day-Lewis, John Osborne, Karel Reisz, Michael Redgrave, Arnold Wesker, and N. F. Simpson. See pages 57-58 of Little & McLaughlin for a reprint of Anderson’s leaflet. The production ran its full length, a testament to George Devine’s commitment to Arden and his own belief in what Tony Richardson termed “the right to fail.” Devine stated that “[the Court] must continue to support the people we really believe in, *especially* if they don’t have critical appeal” (Roberts 1999, 77).

¹⁹ While I would be wary of characterizing Arden’s earlier plays as *Lehrstück*, Tshudin’s comments likely spring from the way that the “Court tagged [*Live Like Pigs* and other earlier Arden works] with a misleading, folksy sermonizing [tone]” (Findlater 1965, 93).

Charles Marowitz later stated in his praise of the Chichester Festival's production of *The Workhouse Donkey* (1963):

The curse of John Arden is that he simply won't play ball. After creating a picture of Welfare State slovenliness in the farcical *Live Like Pigs*, he switched gears and gave us the spare and chilling *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Then, all set for more thought-provoking austerity, he trots out *The Happy Haven*, a Commedia dell' Arte zanni on old age....and again [with *Workhouse Donkey*] Arden pulls a volte-face (238).²⁰

Audiences, however, expecting the pedagogical tone of the *Lehrstücke*, likely had something more akin to shared agreement in mind than the shared inquiry and communicative exploration provided by Arden. Arden, in a 1960 interview with Tom Milne and Clive Goodwin, stated his "grave objections to being presented with a character on the stage whom you know to be the author's mouthpiece" (30). Thus, Spurling's asking "Why [does Musgrave hold up the town at gunpoint]? What does he hope to gain from it?" denote questions that Arden has neither any intention of answering nor any ability to answer definitively. Providing answers to these questions would be counterintuitive for Arden, given that he is working against "the modern idea of a sludgy uninterested nation, married to its telly and its fish and chips," and that he sees the business of the dramatist as chipping away at postwar isolation and passivity (1965: 127).²¹

²⁰ Simon Trussler echoes this, stating: "with Arden the talent-spotters never used to know where they were: turning his own declared pacifism topsy-turvy in *Musgrave* one minute, the next he'd be suggesting that the action of *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*....was tangential to the Congolese civil war....There was no trusting him" (1969, 181).

²¹ Arden, along with many other dramatists of the 1950s, "joins...[the] assault on suburban stasis" (Cohen 1985, 201). Similar to the other dramatists in this study, Arden saw isolation and passivity as choking the life out of the theatre and spectators alike.

The following few pages demonstrate both *how* and *why* Arden has neither the ability nor intention of “playing ball” and answering Spurling’s questions.

Musgrave himself and his use of “logic” demonstrate Arden’s refusal to “play ball” or provide answers to his audiences.²² Tracing how Musgrave deploys his logic and implements his revolutionary plan will indicate the manner in which Arden creates his theatre of “not enough.” As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Arden illustrates the inadequacy of current ways of thinking through the problems that his dramas pose; through its treatment of “logic” in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, Arden explores what renders said ways inadequate. Instead of seeing *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* as being “about the results of an imperialist war waged by a capitalist society” or clarifying the relationship between “capitalist economics and war,” I see *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* as being less about *results* and more about the methodology employed to attain results (Itzin 1980, 28-29).²³

Musgrave’s usage of the term “logic” and the manner with which he invests it with meaning challenge spectators to think what logic means to them and in their own historical moment. Furthermore, it challenges spectators to consider the manner in which logic is used less as a means of establishing and substantiating Musgrave’s motives for his actions and more as a ready-made excuse for his brutally simplistic actions. The very term *logic* draws attention to what is said as well as the rationality and suitability of what is said, given that λογική (logic) is rooted in λογος (logos). To invoke logic, then, does not merely refer to the establishment of

²² As Robert Skloot notes, while *Musgrave* “poses these questions and attempts to suggest answers to them; Arden hopes we will be moved to find our own” (1975, 209).

²³ It is important to remember that the word *method* always implies action of some sort; the Latin *methodus* simply means the mode of proceeding one chooses while performing a task.

what can be understood as objectively true as opposed to that which is merely *taken* as true;²⁴ it also, via its etymological relationship with oration and discourse, implies an awareness of what need be expressed and the most rhetorically effective manner in which to do so.²⁵ Additionally, Musgrave overstates logic's relationship to Logos (the Word), investing his actions with a theological import and prophetic necessity. In the Christian tradition, Logos refers to the second person of the trinity and thus denotes the word being made flesh, an embodiment of divine knowledge and capability.²⁶ Musgrave sees himself, then, as an agent of divine knowledge as well as a bringer of divine justice and wrath.

Musgrave, in his embrace of the philosophical and theological aspects of logic, elides the rhetorical and oratorical implications of the term. At no point does he carefully consider his audience, the townspeople, or what methods of discourse would have the most purchase with them. Instead, Musgrave has a quasi-prophetic message to deliver and the townspeople are tasked with accepting its truth and recognizing its power. His audience has neither agency nor any say in the matter; they simply exist to listen, learn, and be killed. Musgrave's "logic" thus highlights the relationship between communication, order, and force.²⁷ As a result, while it might seem that "a web of agential relationships, rather than the individual character, is the pertinent cognitive and analytical focus of Arden's dramaturgy," one still must consider what

²⁴ My usage of "objectively true" instead of truth via correspondence or concordance stems from Gottlob Frege's "Thought: A Logical Investigation." See Frege's *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*. Ed. Brian McGuinness (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

²⁵ Linking logic and rhetoric has long been common; see Cicero's *De Oratore* and *Topica*. In fact, in Cicero's time, logic was overshadowed by rhetoric; it was, in many respects, a discipline only to be studied in conjunction with rhetoric as opposed to its own stand-alone method of inquiry.

²⁶ See the 1st verse of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (KJV).

²⁷ Logic in many respects becomes shorthand for Musgrave's own vision of order and right behavior: "as I understand Logic and Logic to me is the mechanism of God" (P1 313). Logic provides balance to the world while also being "objectively true."

sort of threads and fibers constitute this web (Malick 1990, 215). Focusing upon Musgrave's use of logic and his separation of it from rhetoric and oratory will allow for a careful analysis of how these webs are woven as well as their strength.

The first of the many mentions of "logic" in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* demonstrate how Musgrave views and uses logic. At the end of Act I, Musgrave and his men meet at the town's churchyard to discuss their plans. As is their custom, the soldiers bicker with one another until Musgrave interrupts them, saying "We are here with a word. That's all. That's particular. Let the word dance. That's all that's material, this day and for the next. What happens afterwards, the Lord will provide" (P1 258).²⁸ Immediately thereafter they depart and Musgrave "*walks downstage, crosses his hands on his chest and stands to pray*" (259). His prayer, with its focus on clarity and on his own role as bringer of truth, demonstrates how he thinks logic is something that one must simply accept as a given, not something that governs a mode of engagement:

My prayer is: keep my mind clear so I can weigh Judgement against the Mercy
and Judgement against the Blood, and make this Dance as terrible as You have
put it into my brain. The Word alone is terrible: the Deed must be worse. But I
know it is Your Logic, and You will provide (259).

At the outset, Musgrave views logic as "Logic," as something that is holy and divine. Logic, then, *must* be unilaterally accepted; one is impelled to do so by its sheer self-evidence and power.

²⁸ The notion of a dancing word recurs throughout *Musgrave*, even after Musgrave himself performs the titular dance in front of the gathered townspeople. The idea of a word dancing imparts a ritualistic, frenzied, Bacchic quality to his prophetic word. The dance Musgrave performs, then, bears little similarity to the dances performed in Yeats's dance plays and far more similarity to the frenzied dances in Caryl Churchill and David Lan's *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986).

Arden, however, foreshadows the lack of purchase such “logic” will have amongst the townspeople by immediately showing how open to ridicule Musgrave and his plans are. As the soldiers exit prior to Musgrave’s prayer, “*the BARGEE enters....[and] parodies [Musgrave’s prayerful] attitude behind his back*” (259). After Musgrave finishes, he “*still fails to see the BARGEE. The latter has whipped off his hat at the conclusion of MUSGRAVE’S prayer, and now he stands looking solemnly up to Heaven. He gives a sanctimonious smirk and breathes: ‘Amen’*” (259). While the Bargee momentarily recognizes the power and feeling underwriting Musgrave’s logical system, he nonetheless ridicules it, seeing it as incoherent and far from *apropos* to the community’s actual needs.²⁹ Furthermore, the Bargee sees Musgrave’s sanctity as somewhat affected and self-serving; the Bargee finds Musgrave’s dubbing himself as the voice in the wilderness humorous.

Additionally, Musgrave sees this logic as belonging to him alone. Musgrave, responding to Hurst’s objection that his plan “isn’t enough....what you and that old cuckold [Attercliffe] are reckoning to do,” states: “Leave it alone, boy. *I* hold the logic. *You* hold some beer and get on with your work” (265).³⁰ Musgrave, as *the* agent of divine knowledge, sees logic as proprietary, not as something shared or sharable.³¹ Musgrave thus reminds one of Lewis Carroll’s ideas regarding the semantic intelligibility of definitions. Carroll, in his *Symbolic Logic II*, argues that if one is to use a conventional term in a nonconventional way, then he should provide his

²⁹ See Grant Edgar McMillan’s “The Bargee in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*” (1973) for a brief analysis of the Bargee. I see the Bargee as a quasi-Bacchic figure, but the argument could be made that he is a much more sinister figure, given his “delight in destruction and violence” (501).

³⁰ Although it seems that one could view Musgrave’s secrecy as a tactical necessity, one should not forget that he is addressing his fellow co-conspirators who have already followed him into outlawry to *escape* the rigid, staid life of the military. As *Armstrong* suggests, outlawry can constitute an alternative order, but the sort of “respect” Musgrave wants seems to be more at home in the imperial army than it does as leader of a group of deserters.

³¹ As he later states in his dialogue with the townspeople, “there’s someone who finds out Logic and brings the wheel around” (312). Musgrave discovers this variant of logic; his task, as he sees it, is to make its effects felt in the world. It is not something that needs to be explained or agreed upon, but something that must be felt and acknowledged by one man alone.

definition at the outset, after which the reader must “meekly accept his ruling [for the duration of the text], however injudicious [the reader] may think it” (1977, 232). Even if Musgrave’s definition of logic were coherent – and one can argue that it is overly coherent to the point that of non-relationality – the fact remains that it is not communicated to his audience. While Musgrave’s refusal to articulate fully this logic contributes to the dramatic tension of the play, it serves also to demonstrate the impossibility of answering questions like “What does he hope to gain by [holding up the town]?” given that such questions carry the assumption that “gain[ing]” something was the point. In some respects, Musgrave merely seeks revenge on the society that sent him to war; however, to classify *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* as a revenge play in the tradition of Aeschylus or Seneca unnecessarily flattens out Musgrave as a character as well as the dramatic action. Musgrave seems motivated less by revenge and more by justice, by the desire to achieve or reassert some modicum of balance in society; even this, however, seems not quite satisfactory, prompting the question as to whether one could call such brutal actions just. Arden suggests that the internal logic governing Musgrave’s external actions can perhaps be coherent, but coherent to the point of absurdity, making the question of what he hopes to gain by turning a Gatling gun on unarmed townspeople an unanswerable query.

Arden’s refusing to invest Musgrave’s actions with a recognizable or plausible internal logic adroitly provides the spectator with a challenge as well as an opportunity for action. Through Musgrave, Arden demonstrates that one can twist anything into something resembling logical cohesion and can also view oneself as a possessor of exclusive truth if one never allows oneself to be challenged by others. Cobbling together a rational, logical course of action – especially on the revolutionary scale intended by Musgrave and his men – is a

markedly *social* process for Arden. It is a process that requires peer-review of some sort and has precious little room for statements like “I hold the logic,” seeing such unilateral proclamations as being a vestige of the status quo more so than an agent of transformation. The brutal simplicity of Musgrave’s logic would likely have been challenged or tempered in some manner had it been discussed openly. At the very least, Musgrave would have had to explain and justify the twists and aporias his logical system creates. Instead, his “logic” remains but a thin skein of incoherent justification covering a hulking mass of cold, calculated violence.

Once the townspeople learn that Musgrave’s plan comes down to “Twenty-five to die and the Logic is worked out. Who’ll help me?” they are both shocked and unconvinced of its soundness (314). The Pugnacious Collier states, “I think they’re all balmy, the whole damn capful’s arse-over-tip” (314) and Walsh simply utters “I don’t know. I don’t trust it...I’ve not yet got this clear” (317). Musgrave had not considered *how* to deliver his message to the townspeople. He relied on explication and shows of force to build support, not on open dialogue.³² As a result, nobody recognizes his *logic* as being such, seeing him merely as “balmy” at worse or, at best, suspect. Even when Hurst, annoyed at Musgrave’s adherence to logic, clarifies their intentions to the striking miners, stating that the “ones we want to deal with aren’t, for a change, you and your mates, but a bit higher up. The ones as never get hurt. (*He points at the* MAYOR, PARSON *and* CONSTABLE.) Him. Him. Him” (316), the moment has already passed.

³² As fascist interwar regimes show, force can indeed create support, but it is rarely the sort of grassroots support for social transformation that Musgrave wants. Aside from achieving vengeance and justice, Musgrave seemingly wants to provoke a substantive change in the hearts and minds of the townspeople. It is this change that proves difficult, if not impossible, to attain via coercive force.

Even at the play's end, the relationship between rhetoric and logic still escapes Musgrave's mental grasp. The landlady, Mrs. Hitchcock, attempts to draw Musgrave's attention to the particularities of the town and its needs when she visits him and Attercliffe in jail:

All wrong, you poured it out all wrong! I could ha' told you that last night if only I'd known – the end of the world and you thought you could call a parade....Look at it this road: here we are, and we'd got life and love. Then *you* came in and you did your scribbling where nobody asked you. Aye, it's arsy-versey to what you said, but it's still an anarchy, isn't it? And it's all your work (323-324).

Musgrave refuses to acknowledge her comments, saying that "I brought [a war into this town] to end it" (324); he still does not see that his actions and words required an audience who could understand and interpret their value and import. He fails to understand that the war he brought to town had precious little to do with their workaday lives and struggles. Even when Attercliffe states that "To end it by its own rules: no bloody good. She's right, you're wrong. You can't cure the pox by further whoring," all Musgrave can manage is a weak, pleading, "That's not the truth. God was with me...God...." (324). The play, however, closes with a moment of guarded hope from Attercliffe, a hope that a different audience might yet make sense of their failed actions: "They're going to hang us up a length higher nor most apple-trees grow, Serjeant. D'you reckon we can start an orchard?" (326).

The difficulty of finding and engaging adequately with an audience, then, is at the heart of the drama. Musgrave's logic falls apart not only because of its brutal simplicity but also because of Musgrave's failure to recognize the needs of the audience. Arden, however, is not

merely stating that those with power often misuse logic, nor is he trying to demonstrate how logic as a philosophical category is flawed. Arden suggests that logic is necessary, but that logical agreement or understanding requires certain modes of shared inquiry. As the ending of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* shows, it is the judgment of others that substantiates whether an argument or proposed course of action is indeed logical. The logical planning of one man alone can never be enough to transform or inspire society.

Arden, writing in *Encore* after the first run of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* had completed, repeats that his entire notion of spectatorship revolves around refusing to provide spectators with what they normally expect. Arden balances recognizing the needs of an audience with pushing them further down the path towards new forms of spectatorship:

I have found in my own very tentative experiments that audiences (and particularly critics) find it hard to make the completely simple response to the story that is the necessary preliminary to appreciating the meaning of the play. Other habits of playgoing have led them to expect that they are going to have to begin by forming judgements, by selecting what they think is the author's 'social standpoint' and then following it to its conclusion (1965: 128)

Unlike the townspeople in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, Arden's audiences are given something to respond to but are also challenged to put aside their standard spectatorial practices. Spectators are challenged to find newer and more adequate ways of engaging with and thinking through the performance. Arden, simply put, does not give spectators enough to form early judgments or home in on his social standpoint any more than he provides characters who serve as his

“mouthpiece.” Spectators are not given “enough” so as to prompt them to come together with others and think it through.

Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance requires that spectators re-evolve together, that they remain mindful of their limits as spectators – by not overstating their ability to effect meaningful, lasting change in an instant – as well as their responsibility as a spectator to wrestle with the production and to make meaning of it despite not being “told everything” (1966, 42). Arden wants spectators to see the danger in either giving themselves over to quick, simple solutions or allowing themselves to become complacent. Both of these options are insufficient. What Arden proposes, then, is akin to Auden and Isherwood’s interwar notion that being a spectator means one is inherently both a theorist and a practitioner. Arden, then, far from being “a revolutionary....[who] examines social institutions and social relationships from a revolutionary point of view,” possesses a more measured, careful notion of how spectators can and should contribute to a performance (Hunt 1974, 21-22).³³

Arden emphasizes what *sort* of theorist or practitioner one will be. For Arden, it is a matter of contemplating the methodology and scope of one’s ideas and actions. One must determine whether one’s ideas and actions suit one’s historical moments. This methodological contemplation, however, must be done while one continues thinking and acting. Method, after all, concerns itself with how one proceeds, not with stasis. As Arden himself later said, “You can’t cure the pox [the way Musgrave tries to], but the pox *has* to be cured. Otherwise you’ve got a raging disease that’s running around among the population” (1991, 169). Arden suggests

³³ For those still inclined to think of Arden in revolutionary terms, Michael Cohen’s linking of Arden’s sense of morals to Tolstói’s is useful: “there is a tendency [in Arden] to give morals priority over politics: a belief, like Tolstói’s, in *moral* rather than *political* revolution” (201, emphases mine).

that the challenge of being a spectator—as well as a citizen—in postwar Britain is to not simply work towards making those cures. The challenge is to work towards them with the knowledge that not all avenues of exploration or inquiry are equal.

Serjeant Musgrave's Dance makes clear this challenge; *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* demonstrates the difficulty of accepting it.

III. Critique and Judgment: *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*

Armstrong's Last Goodnight: An Exercise in Diplomacy opened at the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, directed by Denis Carey, on 5 May, 1964. It received its English première at the Chichester Festival Theatre on 6 July 1965 before moving to London's National Theatre on 12 October 1965, both directed by John Dexter and William Gaskill; for both its English and London productions, Arthur Finney starred as Armstrong, with Robert Stevens as Lindsay. *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* draws from the Border ballad, "Johnie Armstrong," telling how John Armstrong of Gilnockie, a notorious Scottish Border reiver, was killed by the order of King James V of Scotland in 1530.³⁴ Arden, although he draws from the ballad and employs a Scots dialect, quickly reminds audiences that while "this play is founded upon history...it is not to be read as an accurate chronicle" (P2 135). Armstrong's continuous raiding of Northumberland had become a hindrance to diplomacy with England whilst also making the authority of James, only 17 years old and the *de facto* ruler of Scotland for but two years, appear rather weak.³⁵

³⁴ "Johnie Armstrong" is Child ballad 169; see Francis James Child's collection, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882-1898). "Armstrong" is located in volume 6, "Other Outlaws."

³⁵ While James had dismissed his regents in 1524, his stepfather, Archibald Douglas, the Earl of Angus, took custody of James and held him as a virtual prisoner for over 3 years. After escaping from Angus' care in 1528, his first actions

Under the pretext of a hunting party, James V had promised Armstrong and his men safe conduct to Caerlanrigh; upon Armstrong's arrival, he and 36 of his men were disarmed and then hanged.³⁶ The border ballad focuses on James's treachery and Armstrong's bravery, describing him as a semi-legendary hero who, along with his 160 men, kept the English out of Scotland.³⁷

Armstrong's Last Goodnight: An Exercise in Diplomacy, depicting the tripartite conflict between Border reivers, the Stewart government, and the administration of Henry VIII, dramatizes the moral, intellectual, and physical exercise that constitutes diplomacy. After a brief prologue by David Lindsay, the play opens with a conference between the royal commissioners of England and Scotland who are attempting to "secure ane certain time of peace, prosperity, and bliss on ilk side of the Border" (P2 145).³⁸ The peace negotiations prove difficult, primarily because of border outlaws, the English accusing the Scots of "masterless raids from Scotland into England in search of booty...[which are] openly encouraged, indeed in origin set on, by great men in your kingdom," and the Scots retorting that "For every heid of cattle the Scots hae grippit, your English carls [commoners/churls] took twelve" (P2 147, 148). The most intrepid of these outlaws is John Armstrong of Gilnockie and it is the task of David Lindsay, James's

as King of Scotland were to push the Douglas family into exile and subdue the Border reivers and the chiefs of the Western Isles. See Jamie Cameron's *James V: The Personal Rule, 1528-1542* (Tuckwell Press, 1998).

³⁶ Jamie Cameron sees the Armstrong affair as pivotal in James's securing his power base, stating that this action demonstrates how "one of strengths of Stewart kingship lay in the ability to wait until the right political circumstances arose before making the desired move. James had waited two years for this expedition, but it achieved the result he wanted" (80).

³⁷ Arden's key change from the ballad is that in *Armstrong*, as was the case with *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, "There is no thorough-going villain and no unassailable hero" (Gilman 61). For Arden, Johnnie Armstrong is no hero, nor is Lindsay simply a politically duplicitous villain. Both Armstrong and Lindsay are "shown as men who struggle in different ways with their own drives and assertive needs, and the restraints it puts upon them....to have to uphold a social order" (Shrapnel 231).

³⁸ I have let much of the Scots that Arden uses remain as is; for particularly difficult words, I have provided a translation in brackets immediately following said word. These translations utilize both Arden's glossary at the end of *Armstrong* as well as the *OED*.

former tutor and current courtier, to be “confidential emmisasair to treat forthwith Armstrong, seek some fair means of agreement, and in the end secure baith the lealty and obedience of this dangerous freebooter” (P2 151). The remainder of the play, until the final conference at the end that results in Armstrong’s death, can be said to revolve around the interactions between and the political games played by both Armstrong and Lindsay.

Armstrong is shown to be wily as well as wild, with his introduction to audiences depicting his betrayal of his former rival Johnstone of Wamphray to the rival Stobs clan. Despite having promised him “friendship, brotherhood, and ane certain protection and assistance against all heinous attempts,” Armstrong gets Wamphray drunk and allows the Eliots of the Stobs clan to “*force [Wamphray] back to the big tree [located center-stage], and pin him to it with their spears*” (156, 162). Similarly, Lindsay persuades Armstrong to pledge his fealty to James and become “Warden of Ecksdale. Lieutenant. Ane Officer of the King” and to thus turn away from his longtime protector, Robert, Lord Maxwell since becoming James’ warden would shore up the borderlands for James (176). Lindsay suspects that Armstrong’s “promises will be broke...for Lord Maxwell will encourage it. I believe indeed Lord Maxwell is paid to encourage it by the English Ambassador” (184). The Stobs press Armstrong to return to outlawry, to “ride wi’ the Eliots, or die like a Johnstone” whereas Armstrong insolently demands “ane absolute latitude and discretion for my governance of this territory” as well as the lands of Johnstone of Wamphray (214, 217). Armstrong’s continued outlawry dashes Lindsay’s plans for the establishment of an autonomous canton “of the borderers of either nation” that would be ruled

by Armstrong, “an honest man to deal with...[since] his treacheries derive frae the occult procuration of dark men that movit ahint [behind] of him” (222).³⁹

Lindsay realizes that Armstrong will be “as dangerous – and as lunatic – as the maist promiscuous Evangelist that ever held a book” and that he must “match [Armstrong’s] fury, and with reason and intelligence” (235).⁴⁰ He then puts his plan into place, to have the king promise “Free Pardon and as ane Safe Conduct upon his arrival at Carlanrigg” (239); James’s agreeing to the plan prompts Lindsay to state that “The King has become ane adult man this day” (239). Upon arrival at Caerlanrigh, Armstrong is instructed that, according to custom, “baith you and your men remove their weapons and leave them [in a pile away from the meeting place]” (243). After surrendering his weapons, James states that “Ye are ane strang traitor. The hale of your life ye have set at nocht the laws and commandments of the kingdom” and then commands that Armstrong and his men be hung (245). Lindsay realizes that what was done to Armstrong won’t be soon forgotten but also knows that his actions firmly secured the crown for the Stuarts. Lindsay ends with an admission of his own faults as well as an indictment of all those involved, including the borderers: “here may ye read the varieties of dishonour, and determine in your mind how best ye can avoid whilk ane of them, and when” (248).

³⁹ As Lindsay’s mistress says, while Armstrong possesses the potential to be an excellent ruler, he remains “unpredictable....Whiles he is generous and intelligent, ane lion, gif ye will – but when he turns intil ane wolf...” (226). Lindsay, however, hopes to “preserve [Armstrong’s] manhood and [his] liberty in the face of either nation,” even if that makes [Lindsay] a rebel or traitor to Scotland; his concern, it seems, is for what believes to be the good of the realm (228).

⁴⁰ It quickly becomes clear that in “his ain een [Armstrong thinks himself] an Emperour” (218), not an officer of the crown; this prediction becomes true when Lindsay learns that the Armstrongs and the Eliots of Stobs crossed the border into Cumberland, burning the town of Salkeld and slaying the “Laird of Salkeld...within his ain fold-yard” (223).

As with *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, the reviews for *Armstrong* were somewhat mixed. John Gross lauds Arden for how "he respects the sheer *otherness* of the past, instead of regarding it merely as an adjunct to the present," stating that, despite the play being "too long....[the] over-all effect, however, is one of spiky integrity" (41-42). Penelope Gilliatt notes how the drama "throws up visual images very vividly...[providing] sweet love scenes and swift treacheries, a sense of tragedy that is cool and rather chaste." Harold Hobson, who had savagely panned *Musgrave* 6 years earlier, found *Armstrong* to be even worse: "a ragbag of clichés old and new....In the end the sheer, intolerable boredom is too much for one's strength. Last Tuesday at Chichester was a penal experience" (35).⁴¹ Even Leslie Evershed-Martin, the founder of the Chichester Festival Theatre, remarked that it "is probably one of the best but most misunderstood plays we have produced. Most people found it...very difficult to understand due to the use of Scottish Lowland speech" (121).⁴² Ronald Bryden, although excited about the play, admitted to "struggling headachingly with the denser accents, as with rapid German" (783). Mervyn Jones likewise struggled, stating that his friends "frankly admitted that for them the play might as well have been in Japanese" (15).⁴³ A great deal of the issue stems from the fact that Arden "constructed, not imitated, a language" (Page 81), creating not a direct imitation of sixteenth-century Scots, but "a sort of Babylonish dialect that will...yet suggest the

⁴¹ It is not surprising that Esslin later complained about London critics, stating that they "seem unwilling to read anything about any play they see and therefore have to rely on what gets through to them in performance" (1966, 67).

⁴² This was the second play of Arden's to see its première at the Chichester Festival Theatre, with *The Workhouse Donkey* being performed two years prior. Gaskill had previously directed *The Happy Haven* at the Royal Court.

⁴³ Even later, more reflective accounts of *Armstrong*, such as Andrew Kennedy's *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language* (Cambridge 1975) state that Arden's dialect loses energy because despite its "liveliness, it is a language not 'open' to the way language is being lived and re-made under the pressure of new modes of thought and being" (228). I find Kennedy's critique odd given that Arden constructed this dialect *in* the 1960s and *for* the 1960s theatergoing public, but it is worth noting that the use of dialect remained an issue for over a decade.

sixteenth-century" (P2 136).⁴⁴ Language issues notwithstanding, Bamber Gascoigne lamented how "the final effect is of so many truths being stated and none being investigated" (24). Edwin Morgan echoes Gascoigne, stating that

[*Armstrong*] is a play about expediency, and it is expediency of which the author does not visibly disapprove....I find it hard to exclude a feeling of uneasy disappointment – a feeling that I have been fobbed off with a theatrical pattern by a man whose great talents should be devoted to exploring his themes far more deeply and at a far warmer level of involvement. If Arden doesn't know what he thinks about kings and outlaws, or gypsies and householders, or soldiers and colliers, or doctors and old women, he should *try to find out*. It matters! (50-51).

After Morgan's review, which castigates Arden for neither "exploring his themes" with sufficient depth nor "visibly disapprov[ing]" what is markedly unethical behavior, Arden finally issued a response: "I find the whole sequence of events in the play so alarming and hateful (while at the same time so typical of political activity in any period) that I have – perhaps rashly – taken for granted a similar feeling among the audience" (1964, 51).⁴⁵

Although *Armstrong* is a chronicle play and thus more inclined to revel in "the picturesque qualities of its subject" than pursue theme in an Ibsenian, psychological realist manner, Morgan's critique nonetheless demonstrates *what* audiences still expected of Arden

⁴⁴ For the 1973 revival at the Northcott Theatre, Exeter, Arden allowed revisions for the text, making it "shorter and with simpler language. The rewriting was done initially by John Dove and Rhys McConnochie" with Arden advising as necessary (85). Page continues, noting that this "new text appears markedly an improvement from the viewpoint of audiences – at least outside Scotland" (87). Additionally, Page admits that *Armstrong*, much like *Musgrave* and *The Island of the Mighty*, "become[s] more comprehensible at second seeing or reading" (139).

⁴⁵ Morgan's critique predates Arden's statement that theatregoers often "expect that they are going to have to begin by forming judgements, by selecting what they think is the author's 'social standpoint' and then following it to its conclusion" (1965: 128).

(Gross 41). Based on Morgan's review, audiences seemingly expected to have the drama clearly demonstrate the author's feelings towards the subject instead of prompting them to comb their own affective and intellectual responses to the events onstage. Using a "Babylonish dialect that...suggest[s] the sixteenth century" contributes to this need to respond, as the very language of the play cannot be readily consumed but must be engaged with, must be responded to (P2 136). The very diction and syntax of the play requires spectators to make calculated judgments as to what is being communicated. Arden's goal in *Armstrong*, then, is to draw spectators' attention to their own judgments, not merely to present his own. The task of the playwright, Arden argues, is neither to arbitrate what is right and wrong nor explain his own thoughts on a given subject but to provide "an instrument to interpret the feelings of a community" (1966, 53). Arden, reviewing Willett's *Brecht on Theatre*, praises how Brecht saw theatre as capable of "assisting the members of [a given] society to eliminate the defects in the image [of human society we all help construct] and eventually to improve it" (1964, 10). What Arden provides in *Armstrong*, then, is his critical interpretation of the feelings swirling about in Great Britain in the mid-1960s; the task of spectators is to judge this interpretation, paying careful attention to how they form their own judgments and possibly "eliminat[ing] the defects" they find therein.

Arden also prompts spectators to do the intellectual and affective work of relating the staged events of sixteenth-century Scotland to their current historical moment. While one can indeed view this in a Brechtian light, seeing as how Arden uses a historical setting "because of the distancing, [making] it easier for the dramatist to gain *objectivity* from the audience, without the loss of involvement," doing so obscures the specificity of Arden's own dramaturgy (Milne 1961, 56). Arden instead focuses less on the attainment of objectivity and more upon

methodology; Arden is interested in *how* one comes to a point of critical judgment more so than setting the conditions for said judgment to occur.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Arden's reliance on the distant past allows him to critique contemporary social issues without having to provide recommendations for action; as he said in an *Observer* interview with Irving Wardle: "If I'd written directly about [contemporary social issues] I would have had to point out what to do about it, or shown both sides of the question – and showing both sides on modern issues produces something pretty inconclusive" (19). This use of history and its effect on spectators thus affords him the opportunity to elicit thoughts and feelings without prescribing solutions. As Arden said in "Some Thoughts upon Left-Wing Drama" (1961):

A play that is a sermon and no more will be in danger of preaching only to the converted. But if the sermon is expressed in terms of a poetic statement...*and given to the audience to hold, as it might be a ripe apple, so that they could look at it all round and decide for themselves whether it is sound or not* – then one may have some hope of affecting a change in somebody's heart (194-195, emphases mine).

As Helena Forsås Scott notes, Arden lamented how "the style of the old popular [dramatic] tradition....is being quenched by a new order which turns the theatre into a place for arid speech-making and sermonizing" (7). Arden's refusal to give spectators just another sermon is actually his way of allowing spectators to interact with the drama in new ways while also critiquing the dramatic status quo. Giving the audience something to hold, trusting spectators to do something of their own with the performance, is the *sine qua non* of Arden's dramaturgy.

⁴⁶ This is not to say that Brecht is not interested in methodology; far from it, as Arden himself notes in "Brecht and the brass trade" (1965): "if we do know *what* action is to take place we shall be able to concentrate our whole attention upon *how* it takes place and *why*" (6). The difference between Brecht and Arden resides in the manner that spectators are brought to this point by the performance as well as the differing amounts of focus each give to methodology.

Furthermore, by comparing the drama-cum-poetic statement to a ripe apple, Arden suggests that spectators should take a bite out of the drama, so to speak, that they should engage with it in a visceral, yet practical, manner.⁴⁷ Arden thus echoes Auden's sentiment in "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" that for poetry to have a substantive effect on "somebody's heart," it must first be "modified in the guts of the living" (24). The remainder of this section will examine the ways that *Armstrong* is "given to the audience to hold," looking first at instances of direct address and secondly at Lindsay's commentaries on his own actions.⁴⁸

My focusing on the areas that allow for greater audience interaction serves as a departure from the standard readings of *Armstrong*, which tend to focus on either the relationship between Lindsay and Armstrong or their development as characters. Instead of seeing the "true subject [of the play as being] Lindsay's problems and changes" (Page 1985, 77) or proving that "It is clear that Arden's sympathies lie with Armstrong" (Gilman 1966, 61), I agree with Malick that what is most relevant to the purpose of the play is the disagreement between Lindsay and Armstrong because it is what allows spectators to view the ensuing "power struggle critically and parabolically" (Malick 1995, 95). Just as Yeats's dance plays allowed spectators to become physically closer to the action onstage, Arden's *Armstrong*

⁴⁷ Arden's later, more community theatre and devised theatre productions illustrate his valuation of this sort of engagement. See the works he and Margaretta D'Arcy wrote during their early years in Ireland as well as Victoria Manchester's "Let's Do Some Undressing: The 'War Carnival' at New York University" (1967), which describes a devised work created by Arden, D'Arcy, and the faculty and students at NYU in protest of Vietnam.

⁴⁸ If my constant use of the word judgment brings Kantian aesthetics to mind, this is purely a matter of unintended association. Whereas Kant's *Critique of Judgment* presses the subject to locate a categorical imperative of some sort, Arden possesses a more diachronic outlook. For Arden, the point is to understand one's historical moment and to place one's own historical moment in dialogue with others in order to judge adequately the shortcomings of the political, ethical, and social frameworks of which we are a part. It is a matter of context, not a matter of finding what Kant terms as an "ideal norm" of any sort (76). That said, Arendt's take on exemplary validity and her formulation of the ability of historical events to carry an import and meaning that goes beyond their original enactment could be of use to Arden critics; see *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 84ff.

prompts them to become intellectually and affectively closer to the action and “to decide for themselves whether it is sound or not.” Focusing on spectators’ reactions and interactions with the drama also demonstrates the social malaise against which Arden protested.⁴⁹ As Eric Hobsbawm notes, Britain, despite its increases in material wealth and the advent of universal adult suffrage, remained “united [only]...by massive social segregation, by separate life-styles or even clothing, and by the constriction of life-chances” (305). Arden captures this strange unity by showing the need for informed, carefully considered social action while also exposing the social practices that often constrict and numb spectators’ ability to formulate affective, intellectual responses to the performance. Arden illustrates how spectators “have lost or buried the faculty of responding imaginatively to a play which communicates obliquely” while concurrently providing options for them to rediscover and refashion this faculty (Milne 1961a, 22).

Similar to Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6*, *Armstrong* utilizes a tripartite stage, with a palace building downstage left, a forest setting with a large tree upstage center, and a castle building downstage right, with a large cyclorama at the back of the performance area depicting a Southern Uplands forest.⁵⁰ The very staging of the play mirrors the tripartite struggle between the borderers, Stuarts, and Tudors.⁵¹ For the first scene only, there is a “A

⁴⁹ The very fact, after all, that spectators were unwilling or seemingly incapable of interacting with a non-sermonizing drama illustrates the paucity of other arts and modes of being to prepare them for the license Arden offers.

⁵⁰ See Arden’s “Note on Sets and Costumes” in his prefatory remarks to the play for a detailed drawing and further information about the staging. Arden states that the play should be “played within the medieval convention of ‘simultaneous mansions’ ...[the three mansions] need not be more than porches or tabernacles: but their style should be definite and suggestive” (P2 137). For reference, the Southern Uplands denotes the border area of Dumfriesshire, Armstrong’s traditional base of power.

⁵¹ As Joan Tindale Blindheim notes, “the action of [*Armstrong* is]...contained within the framework of the staging, and thus largely determined by it....Arden has made excellent use of its potentialities, and the simple staging and flexible

trestle table [is] in the middle of the stage, arranged with papers and ink etc., and stools placed for a conference" (P2 145). Before the first character comes onstage and the first lines are uttered, spectators are provided with a setting that demonstrates the need to confer, listen, and mediate the demands of the palace in Edinburgh, Armstrong's Dumfriesshire castle, and the wildness of the Southern Uplands. The audience, in short, is shown an arena where careful, considered responses prove vitally necessary. The opening lines of the drama, spoken by Lindsay, directly address spectators and draw their attention to the act of conferring:

There was held, at Berwick-upon-Tweed, in the fifteenth year of the reign of James the Fift, by the Grace of God King of Scotland, and in the nineteenth year of Henry the Eight, by the Grace of God King of England, ane grave *conference* and consultation betwixt Lords Commisioner frae baith the realms, anent [as regards] the lang peril of warfare that trublit they twa sovereigns and the leige [bound/allegiant] peoples thereunto appertainen. The intent bean, to conclude this said peril and to secure ane certain time of peace, prosperity, and bliss on ilk side of the Border....As ye will *observe*: when peace is under consideration, there is but little equability of *discourse*. The conference this day bean in the third week of its proceeden (P2 145, emphases mine).

The terms conference, observe, and discourse serve to blur the boundary between spectator and player, prompting the former to not only take note but to actively engage, to consider a way to talk back to the performance in some manner. Spectators' attention is drawn to an instance of people being brought together to have an intense discussion and to solve issues via dialogue.

handling of time and space (for example the walking about the stage to denote the journey between the Palace and the Border Castle) contribute to the ballad-like tone of the play" (1968, 314).

Additionally, the difficult work that such action often requires is highlighted, as this is “the third week of its proceeden,” with the parties still at an impasse. Arden thus hints that some proceedings, some avenues of inquiry are “not enough” in and of themselves. The remainder of the play oftentimes reads as an attempt to make them so, with the subsequent folly and violence reminding spectators of the difficulty and importance of finding a suitable methodology. Accepting that something is “not enough,” Arden again demonstrates, is not an easy proposition.

Arden directs audience attention to the intersection of the social and the intellectual, the politically active and the philosophically contemplative. While *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* demonstrates the sort of simplistic logic that springs forth from intellectual isolation, *Armstrong* depicts the opposite: the difficulties of working collaboratively through a contentious topic.⁵² Additionally, if *Musgrave* presses one to contemplate what *sort* of spectator he will be, *Armstrong* presses one to realize the time and effort required making oneself into this sort of spectator. After directly addressing the audience, Lindsay “retires [from centerstage] into the Palace, and immediately appears upon the roof, from which he watches the rest of the scene” (145). Not only does Lindsay draw spectators’ attention center-stage to the conference, he also implicitly pulls their attention downstage left to the palace building; much like the other dramatists in this study, Arden does not permit spectators to focus overmuch on one aspect of the drama. I agree that “the good stage director allows us the freedom to choose what we watch, and indeed we may see different things at each performance. Theatre invites us to look; it does not prescribe”

⁵² This builds on the Group Theatre’s seeing the spectator as a contributor, a necessary collaborator with the performance; Arden takes for granted this contributor role but also shows the difficult, careful work collaboration requires. Furthermore, it puts to rest any claim that Arden is simplistic enough to think that by simply getting people into a room to hash out ideas one can solve complex social, political, and ethical conundrums.

(Patterson 2003, 3). What Arden “invites us to look” at is the relationality between these “different things.” Arden suggests that attending to how these onstage relationships are structured might prompt a greater awareness and activism regarding the structuring of sociopolitical relationships.

Just as Lindsay requests that spectators “observe” the events onstage and thus refuses to prescribe or interpret the events he introduces, he himself observes the deliberations between the commissioners and clerks. Lindsay remains silent throughout the entire first scene, watching from above the conference proceedings. When he returns in the following scene, he offers no commentary on the conference; instead, he delineates his plan of action:

Yet here I stand and maun contrive
With this sole body and the brain within him
To set myself upon ane man alive
And turn his purposes and win him.

[...]

I will gang toward [Armstrong’s] house
As ane man against ane man,
And through my craft and my humanity
I will save the realm frae butchery
Gif I can, good sir, but gif I can (*P2* 152-153).

He hopes, in short, to act “through policy, nocht force” (151). What remains telling, however, is that despite the sage silence and thoughtful manner he exhibits in the first scene, Lindsay believes he can work it out, that he can both implement the conference’s desire to suppress

Armstrong and clear the “matter of the unruly borderers” (P2 150) as well as avoid the conference’s mistakes. He feels that his rhetorical ability and political acumen, coupled with the authority vested in him by the crown, will prove more than enough to bring Armstrong and the borderers into James’s fold. The audience is implicitly tasked with evaluating the plan of action Lindsay delineates and determining why it ultimately failed.

Lindsay commits to acting “through my craft and my humanity,” but the following few scenes clearly illustrate the difficulty of this commitment. A brief examination of what the words “craft” and “humanity” meant in sixteenth-century discourse will help one understand *why* Lindsay’s plan does not suit his audience, the Armstrongs of Gilnockie. The word craft would have a variety of connotations in the sixteenth century, capable of encompassing the merely descriptive, the positive, and the pejorative. In terms of description, craft denotes something akin to human endeavor and abilities, namely that which differs from nature and the natural world. Additionally, the “seven crafts” (or the seven arts) were the bedrock of medieval universities, including those in Scotland, meaning that craft also denoted a sort of well-rounded scholarship; this meaning was becoming more obscure by the 1530s, but its usage would not have been unfamiliar to someone like Lindsay, whose education at the University of St. Andrews in 1508-1509 would have consisted of the seven crafts.⁵³ Craft could also denote intellectual puissance, the ability to plan or perform skillfully, as well as indicate one’s profession or trade. Pejoratively speaking, craft meant a skillful cunning designed to beguile or defraud another and also had, although this was again becoming obsolete by the 1530s, a

⁵³ The last entry that the *OED* has utilizing this meaning of craft is John Palsgrave’s *Lesclaircissement de langue francoyse*, which was published in 1530, the same year as Armstrong’s execution. All etymological and historical examples are derived from the *OED* entry of craft unless expressly stated otherwise.

connotation of magical enchantment or the placing of another under a magical spell of some sort. Humanity, especially in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, often denoted a complex network of qualities that generally revolved around benevolence, courtesy, and classical erudition.⁵⁴

While it is likely that Lindsay's use of craft meant he would use his well-heeled manner, political guile, and erudition to impress and persuade Armstrong, the connotations surrounding both humanity and craft nonetheless indicate possible missteps in Lindsay's plan. Lindsay's courtesy and manner towards the Armstrongs is suspected as being false and indirect, nothing but a veneer. Armstrong shows the unsuitability of such a manner when he compares Lindsay's clothes to his own. Armstrong notes the "Silk, Satin. Velvet" Lindsay wears and mistakenly thinks Lindsay's "gilt-siller" to be gold, while stating his own clothes as "Linsey-woolsey. Buft leather. Steel" before drawing out his sword to compare it to Lindsay's (P2 170). Lindsay expects to be treated with respect given his position in the Stuart regime, but the Armstrongs assert that "Nae King whatever has had the might to put down Armstrang. Jamie Stuart the Fourth sent against us ane officer, and his horsemen forbye. And....the Laird wi' his ain hand slew [the king's lieutenant]" (171). Lindsay brings a letter stating James V's "offer of Royal privilege" (174) for Armstrong, but Armstrong is illiterate and has to have his wife read the "Precise and laconical" letter to Armstrong (176). Armstrong dubs Lindsay "Mr Hieland Pen-and-Ink" (177) and is said to be no "shave-pate eunuch bible-clerk," demonstrating his disdain for literacy, not to mention the "seven crafts" (175). Armstrong accepts James's offer,

⁵⁴ Scottish universities chiefly used the term "humanity" and its pursuit to describe the study of Latin language and literature; Scotland was a hotbed of classical study, given that it had 4 universities founded prior to the start of the 16th century. See the primary and secondary entries for humanity in the *OED* for further information.

however, as it increases his position in the borderlands. While Lindsay does indeed persuade Armstrong to *hear* James's offer, the bulk of the work is done by Armstrong's quick realization of the largesse and potential of James's offer and his own willingness to abrogate the "ancient lealty" he has to Lord Maxwell (177). Lindsay's mission, then, seems to be a complete success; the events of the play, however, will demonstrate otherwise.

By the time Lindsay and Armstrong again appear onstage together (Act III, Scene 6), Armstrong has realized the stakes of the political game in which he has found himself.⁵⁵ He has the sense to dub Lindsay "ane vanity. Ye are ane wardly infection with your collars and vile titles. I am naeboddy's man but God's" (231). He also states how he cares not a whit for what Lindsay considers to count as "credibility" or "practicality" (231). Armstrong, it seems, finally realizes the difference between what he values – the freedom to do as he wishes without interference from either Edinburgh or London – and what Lindsay, the Stuarts, and the Tudors value – a secure, stable borderland so that business, taxation, and governance can continue uninterrupted.⁵⁶

After his plan's failure, Lindsay is reduced to *reacting* to Armstrong, of having to "match that same fury [Armstrong has], and with reason and intelligence" (P2 235). Lindsay sees that this means he will win but will also "win damnation" (235) because even though his actions will

⁵⁵ See the earlier portions of this section for a refresher of the events of the play between Act I, Scenes 7 and 8 and Act III, Scene 6.

⁵⁶ Arden, though, characteristically refuses to pass judgment on either Lindsay's lack of knowledge of his audience or Armstrong's foolhardy articulation of his being "naeboddy's man." Arden allows the drama to run its course, expecting the audience to see how Lindsay "fails to detect the inconsistency" in his dealings with Armstrong while also prompting them to ask the more difficult question of "what [Lindsay] should have done to avoid self-destruction" (1964b, 51). Following Armstrong's judgment of him, Lindsay has little substantive contact with Armstrong until Act III, Scene 12 – when he delivers the letter falsely guaranteeing "Free Pardon and as ane Safe Conduct" (239) – and Act III, Scene 14, the scene depicting Armstrong's betrayal and execution.

secure the border and prevent war with England for this year, “what we hae done is no likely to be forgotten: this year, the neist year, and mony year after that” (247). In a direct address to the audience, Lindsay states his feelings towards this new plan:

We are but back whaur we began.

A like coat [to my herald’s tabard] had on the Greekish Emperour

When he rase up his brand like a butcher’s cleaver:

There was the knot and he did cut it.

Ane deed of gravity. Wha daur dispute it? (238).

Lindsay’s plans have come to naught and he is back at where he began, attempting to reign in Armstrong via policy and not brute force. Lindsay, though, now sees the relationship between policy and force in the Stuart regime. As he did in *Musgrave* and would later do in *The Business of Good Government*, Arden dramatizes an impossible decision so that spectators sympathize with Lindsay for having to make it without at all condoning his decision. Lindsay recognizes the similarity to his position and function in James’s court to Alexander the Great as he cut the Gordian Knot. Although the new plan to execute Armstrong does not lack in expediency, Lindsay nonetheless feels it to be lacking, deems it to be “not enough” despite having what seems like no alternative.⁵⁷

The audience instead must “decide for themselves” as to how to see Lindsay: as a man of “gravity” or just another “butcher.” Does Lindsay indeed re-evolve in some small manner or are his actions to be read as those of an agent of the status quo? Does Lindsay demonstrate the

⁵⁷ It remains telling, though, that Lindsay does not pass judgment on himself and instead likens himself to Alexander the Great as the latter began his conquest of Asia. Does Lindsay liken himself to Alexander the conquering hero or Alexander the braggadocious fool who tried to put the world under his thumb? That is yet another question Arden leaves for spectators to address.

import of methodology or does he merely give himself over to expediency? The closing lines of the drama foreclose any attempt at answering these questions while also illustrating the need for the audience to decide for themselves:

here ye may read the varieties of dishonour, and determine in your mind how best ye can avoid whilk ane of them and when. Remember: King James the Fift, though but seventeen years of age, did become ane adult man, and learnt to rule his kingdom. He had been weel instructit in the necessities of state by that poet that was his tutor....

LINDSAY concludes his speech with a bow to the audience, and turns away (P2 248).⁵⁸

Lindsay leaves the audience with a bow, an odd gesture for an actor given that this act precedes any curtain call. The act of bowing in early Modern courtly circles served to recognize a difference in rank between two individuals, the bower being of lower social rank than the recipient of the bow. Why, then, does he show deference to the audience? How does this act recognize and validate spectators?

Lindsay's pre-curtain bow to spectators indicates his submission to their judgment. In this sense, his bowing can be seen through a jurisprudential lens, as it remains standard practice in English and Welsh courtrooms for lawyers and court officials to bow to the judge's bench upon entering the room. This action signifies respect for the Queen's justice, as the Royal Coat of Arms is always displayed behind the magistratic bench. Lindsay thus validates and recognizes both the audience's right to as well as *need* to adjudicate while also implicitly

⁵⁸ The drama ends with Lindsay exiting from center-stage; after which "Other members of the cast immediately re-enter and GILNOCKIE'S body is lowered and released before they all make their bows and exit" (P2 248). Lindsay gets the last spoken word, but it is a tableau of Armstrong's dead body that has the final say.

indicating his respect for their role as binding arbiters.⁵⁹ Without a certain sort of response from the audience, all will be for naught. At the same time, however, Arden has swept away the ease of making a simplistic decision. Arden, as Ann Messenger rightly states, “presents complex human beings in complex situations, refusing to take simplistic moral sides himself or allow his audience to do so....[Arden] arouses emotional as well as moral responses which are both complex and equivocal” (1972, 308).⁶⁰ As Arden himself stated in his response to Edwin Morgan’s review of *Armstrong’s Last Goodnight*, while “Lindsay was wrong,” the question nonetheless remains as “to what he should have done to avoid self-destruction,” which is a question “that I cannot pretend to answer” (51). Arden, by providing spectators with a complex situation and eliciting complex responses, then prompts spectators to respond to the question he “cannot pretend to answer.”

Spectators, while not given “enough” in the play to answer this question outright, are implicitly tasked with finding that “enough” through careful thought and deliberation. Arden does this not because he “doesn’t know what he thinks about kings and outlaws, or gypsies and householders, or soldiers and colliers, or doctors and old women,” but because, *pace* Morgan, Arden feels that his thoughts do not “matter” when compared with the thoughts and feelings kindled in spectators (51). What Arden gives spectators is worth far more: the opportunity to

⁵⁹ This is reminiscent of the juror role T.S. Eliot accords to spectators at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral*. Attention must be paid, however, to the different roles that jurors and judges play in the English legal system. In the UK, a professional judge would hear very few criminal cases (usually only the most serious cases) whereas certified judges always hear civil courses. The very fact that Arden implicitly casts spectators as judges denotes the import and severity of the case presented before them.

⁶⁰ In this respect, Arden reminds one of Hegel’s discussion of *Antigone* in his *Aesthetics*. Hegel states that “the interests and aims which fight in the *Antigone*” are “the absolutely substantial forces which...remain now precisely as also as the impetus in action and what is finally the steadily self-realizing” (220-221, 220). The struggle between Lindsay and Armstrong resembles that between Antigone and Creon, as “Interests of an ideal kind must fight one another, so that power comes on the scene against power. These interests are the essential needs of the human heart, the inherently necessary aims of action, justified and rational in themselves” (220).

think about their own methods of working through social, political, and ethical conundrums in a manner that reminds them of their limitations – not all questions, as he has shown, can be answered outright – as well as of their liberty and responsibility to grapple with these issues.⁶¹ After all, Arden’s hope in having spectators “hold [the ideas in the drama], as it might be a ripe apple, so that they could look at it all round and decide for themselves whether it is sound or not” is that granting such license may “have some hope of affecting a change in somebody’s heart” (194-195).

Arden, as mentioned earlier, demonstrates the need to wake up from our collective historical mistakes, to no longer be held in thrall or cowed by nightmarish history. Arden by no means suggests that society has learned from said mistakes, as evidenced by his continued interest in showing the correspondences between the historical past and his own postwar, not quite post-imperial, Britain. Nor does Arden suggest that theatre will be the means to forestall these mistakes from occurring again. Nor does the simple act of paying attention to all the sides of an issue, “look[ing] at it all round” before reaching a decision prove curative. Arden suggests something much more modest, something neither curative nor overconfident in its ability.

Arden modestly offers spectators a vital role in the performance, a role that is equal parts adjudicator and methodologist. Arden does so because this sort of role pushes one to act in a certain manner while also prompting them to attend to *how* and *why* he acts. Additionally, while such a role carries with it no mean amount of responsibility, it also grants a great deal of license to the spectator. It is for this reason that Arden seems to feel that allowing a spectator to

⁶¹ Judges, after all, cannot simply suspend judgment; judges have to make a ruling. The closest recourse to suspending judgment that a judge would have would be to refuse to try a case, which is not an option for Arden’s spectator-judges since the case, i.e. the drama, has already been heard.

test, verify, and judge the poetic statement onstage may “have some hope of affecting a change in somebody’s heart.” Arden, writing at a time “of dissent, instability, fracture and powerlessness,” provided spectators with a chance to voice their dissent, to attempt to cobble together something stable and coherent, and, most importantly, he offered them the opportunity to speak authoritatively about a given topic (Lacey 2002, 16). The trick, as Lindsay suggests, is determining how to speak and act in a manner that avoids the many “varieties of dishonour” that lay in wait. Recognizing the varied instances of “not enough” and engaging with them carefully and methodically, while not a guarantee of success, at least contain within it “some hope” of success.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In his 1937 lyric “Lullaby,” W. H. Auden’s speaker wishes that his sleeping lover will “Find our mortal world enough.” The speaker hopes that the memory of this loving, tender moment—and, presumably, other similar moments—will provide sustenance during “Noons of dryness” and comfort during “Nights of insult.” Auden’s notion of finding the world he inhabits “enough” bears little resemblance to naïveté and is more a matter of disciplined memory, a commitment to recall the simple, stark beauty of intensely private, shared moments in the face of public ridicule and isolation. The poem placed a restorative value on private and shared memories, which is unsurprising given that it was written when governmental intrusion into private lives and the animosity towards social, sexual, political, and ethnic differences had become the norm across much of Europe.

In *Musgrave, Armstrong*, and other dramas, Arden seemingly hopes that we find our collective attempts never enough, but his reasoning is much the same as Auden's. Arden attaches a palliative value on finding things "not enough."⁶² The value of reminding oneself of this "not enough" resembles the disciplined memory found in "Lullaby," but with a subtle difference. Arden suggests that reminding oneself of the instances of encountering and responding to something that is "not enough" can steel one's resolve to combat easy answers, solutions that do not account for the complexity of and in the world. As he said in a 1965 interview with *The Guardian's* Benedict Nightingale: "There is no simple answer [in *Armstrong* or *Musgrave*], which is the natural situation in life" (7). Arden suggests that we need to respond to these "natural situation[s]" instead of being bewildered by them. As this chapter has shown, many of the audience members in attendance at Arden's plays "chose to blame the author rather than themselves for the bewilderment" (7) just as Musgrave failed to recognize how to respond to his audience, the townspeople, and just as Lindsay failed to analyze or respond to his audience, the Armstrongs.

Arden wrote during a time when "the contradictions and tensions that conservative explanations of change suppressed came to the surface" (Lacey 2002, 16) and his expectations of, and license given to, spectators reflects this. Arden, then, instituted more than a theatre of not enough. He pointed towards an *ethics* of not enough. This does not mean that Arden's dramas espouse a caregiver ethic where one individual looks after another; Arden's

⁶² Palliative is important here; were it to be curative, Arden would be contradicting his own notion of the modest aims theatre should have as well as contradicting his later statement that "You can't cure the pox [the way Musgrave tries to], but the pox *has* to be cured. Otherwise you've got a raging disease that's running around among the population" (1991, 169). Theatre cannot provide any cure, but it can have a palliative effect by creating awareness and hope in its spectators.

commitment to an “expansion of the dramatic focus, so as to include the whole community” in many of his plays puts to rest such an idea (Malick 1990, 216).⁶³ An ethics of not enough, Arden suggests, denotes a certain sort and scope of spectatorial fidelity to the entire situation. One must faithfully respond to and engage with the “natural situation[s]” encountered in the theatre; beyond the theatre, one must recall these interpretative acts when everyday life presents one with a social, political, or ethical aporia. The sort of spectatorship Arden calls for mirrors the sort of engaged, active citizenship he desires and sees as capable of “stimulat[ing] change” (1991, 167). Furthermore, an ethics of not enough requires that one avoid the pitfall of Musgrave, demanding that one “never...lose sight of the fundamental humanity which prompts the desire for change” (Patterson 2003, 61), as well as keep in mind the failures of Lindsay, that “One is always coming up against certain circumstances in which one has to make certain compromises, which seem all right until they lead to others, and others – until one is completely turned about” (Nightingale 7). While providing not quite enough oftentimes mean providing spectators with all they can handle, it also means providing spectators with the chance to demonstrate *how* they can handle complexity as well as instill within spectators a willingness to recognize and engage with complexity whenever and wherever they meet it.

Spectators, Arden implies, can do far more than expected despite being given far less than usual. For Arden and for his spectators, the fact that there is “a question that I cannot pretend to answer” should be less a cause for concern and more a chance to put one’s mind and emotions to work.

⁶³ Malick rightly notes that “individuality in [Arden’s] plays is perceived in a radically different way from that of the individualist tradition....Arden’s agents are usually so conceived as to allow the psychological and the social, the individual and the typical, to be dialectically linked” (1990, 211-212).

Conclusion

I'm not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece
may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect.

–Samuel Beckett (1972)

Although it speaks of Beckett's aims in *Not I* (1972), the above quotation could just as well apply to his later play, *Catastrophe* (1982). In the above quotation, Beckett responds to the questions of Jessica Tandy, who played "Mouth" at the Forum Theatre of the Lincoln Center, New York première of *Not I* in September 1972. What strikes me as particularly applicable to this study is Beckett's focus on "the kinetic potential" of Mouth's monologue, on the "hypnotic....[and] visceral" effect it should have on audiences (Brater 1974, 200).¹ Beckett's using *nerves* signifies less a simple annoyance at the events onstage and more a sense of heightened or disordered sensitivity, similar to an attack of nerves suffered by an actor or athlete prior to a performance: stage fright, so to speak. The question remains, though, why would an audience experience stage fright? One of the most common fears people face when taking center stage is the inability to speak, an inability to respond properly to one's fellow actors. Audiences can have an attack of nerves when they know they need to respond but do not know how to craft a response. How to respond to the unintelligible, to that which is not made readily understandable or comprehensible, becomes the challenge just as much as how one makes the unintelligible comprehensible. *Catastrophe*, similar to other short experimental Beckett texts like *Film* (1964) and *Quad* (1984), prompts the spectator to respond without

¹ It is this same article, Enoch Brater's "The 'I' in Beckett's *Not I*" (1974), where his response to Tandy is first quoted.

directing him as to *how* to respond; the naked fact of being confronted with the necessity to respond, these texts suggest, is direction enough.

Throughout this study, I have discussed the ways that theatrical devices – from subtle shifts to staging to direct involvement of the audience in the production – create opportunities for spectators to contribute to the drama. In varied ways, these plays see themselves as laboratories, places where spectators work *with* the production as well as a place where they can contemplate ways to make their voices heard. As such, they make visible the inherent activity of spectatorship, countering notions that spectatorship is a passive activity. *Catastrophe*, however, serves as a reminder of the untapped power that spectators possess and draws attention to the ways spectators fail to use this power wisely or constructively. Much like how Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* calls into question the sorts of collectivities with which one collaborates and Arden's general focus on methodology, *Catastrophe* examines what happens when spectators fail to realize what their being, as Peter Handke notes, "the centre...the occasion...the reason why" (1966, 21), truly means. *Talking Back* has thus far revolved around dramas that allow and invite spectators to respond. Ending with *Catastrophe* allows for two things: (1) an examination of a drama that expects spectators to respond without outlining any parameters for that response and (2) an exploration of how Beckett prompts spectators to think about what sort of theatre they want and how their spectatorial expectations shape that theatre.

Few plays possess as keen a sense of spectatorship – its possibilities and its failings – as Beckett's *Catastrophe*. The plot of the play revolves around the very notion of spectatorship and performance, as audience members watch an *auteur* director (D) and his female assistant (A) during a rehearsal. D and A mercilessly dictate the movements of the play's protagonist (P),

going so far as to move his head, hands, and remove his clothing. A fourth character, Luke (L), remains offstage during the entire performance. Luke controls the lighting and the spectators only hear him in the last few minutes of the play as he responds to D's lighting cues. For twenty minutes, D and A seemingly "reduce a human being to the status of icon of impotent suffering" (Knowlson 1996, 597) and demonstrate "the aesthetic theatricality of violence and domination" (Hansen 2008, 655). The end of the play, however, shows P resisting the violence done to him: "*Distant storm of [pre-recorded] applause. P raises his head, fixes the audience. The applause falters, dies. Long pause. Fade-out of light on face*" (461). The typical response for audiences at the end of the play, applause, is taken from spectators. Instead of audience members unilaterally viewing the spectacle onstage, what they are confronted with is someone gazing back at them, someone demanding reciprocity and a response, a gaze that blurs the line between the spectator and the spectacle itself.

That *Catastrophe* focuses on such inhumane domination and one's response to it should come as no surprise since the play was dedicated to Václav Havel, the Czech dissident and author. At the time of *Catastrophe's* première at the Avignon Festival, Havel had been imprisoned since 1979 for being one of the leaders of The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Persecuted and a signatory of Charter 77, a committee whose aim was to further the goals outlined in Charter 77, which was to help individuals facing unjust persecution and harassment from the secret police.² Havel thus lived under a regime where people "cannot go to school because of their opinions, they cannot defend themselves from falsehoods, they cannot publish their research findings" (Popescu 2012, 10), a regime that "pretends not to possess an

² Havel's *Letters to Olga* (1989), a compilation of letters written to his wife, Olga Havolová, document his prison experience from May 1979 to March 1983.

omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one" (Havel 1991, 136). Little surprise, then, that *Catastrophe* presents a director and assistant who have seemingly omnipotent power over the onstage actor, P.

The spectator in *Catastrophe* may have no knowledge of why P is being dominated so completely by others, but the questions *why* or *how* seemingly matter very little to Beckett. Although this lack of knowledge does indeed make visible "our own difficulty in seeing, in perceiving....our annoying situation as members of the audience," providing the motives behind actions onstage has never been much of a concern for Beckett (Brater 1974, 199). Viewers of *Film* (1964) never learn why O wishes to escape their gaze, viewers of *Not I* (1972) never learn what position Mouth is in, seeing only her lips, teeth, and tongue, nor do viewers of *Quad* (1982) ever learn what motivates the four players' movement. The fact that O wishes to "become imperceptible" is quite clear (Deleuze 1998, 23), and it is equally clear that *Quad* is a daring "venture at overtly staging geometry" (Gontarski 308) that, with its' characters' avoidance of the "danger zone" at the center of the stage, may be a reminder of Beckett's earlier statement in "Dante...Bruno. Vico .. Joyce" that "The danger is in the neatness of identifications" by refusing to allow the most identifiable spot on stage, the center, to ever be occupied (1934, 3). Instead of providing clues regarding the why or the how, Beckett not only confronts spectators with the simple fact of their "authority in determining meaning" but also with the effects that this meaning-making process has (Herren 2000, 54).

While *Film* might make this point more obviously than *Catastrophe*, the latter play nonetheless makes us keenly aware of how "we are always looking at what, perhaps, should not be looked at. We're not quite sure why not, since it isn't as if we haven't seen it before –

only, like the deepest memory of dream, what we're looking at is something forgotten, and only thus remembered" (Blau 1987, 16). Violence against another and the objectification of another human being remain, unfortunately, things that most people have encountered or observed. Furthermore, as Martha Fehsenfeld states in her review of the Avignon première, *Catastrophe* forces spectators "to participate [in P's domination] through our hostile silence. We have been manipulated to witness man's inhumanity and recognize it as our own" (1983, 111). Although Fehsenfeld's thoughts on P's gaze are convincing, there seems to be more at work than recognizing one's own ethical failings or subjecting oneself to a higher moral standard. Beckett seems to be making a more general point about spectatorship.

While I agree that the point of this gaze is to discomfort us, to leave spectators "sharing uncomfortable and knowing nods with one another, [wondering] whether we might have participated as fully in the stripping away of P's humanity as had D" (Hansen 679), and to remind us "of having seen the violence exerted on his body" (Kawashima 2005, 142). What I want to do is bypass without at all negating these arguments in order to make a more general, summative point about spectatorial expectations. What I want to examine instead is how *Catastrophe* "focuses on the act of looking and the power relations in this act" by examining the power relations inherent in spectatorial expectations (McMullan 1993, 27).

Beckett, through P's final action, poses a question about spectatorial expectations of a performance: when we watch a performance, what do we expect to see? Most critics agree that D undoubtedly objectifies P, but what of his aims in doing so, what of his reasons in so doing?³

³ A few recent treatments of this point include Angela Moorjani's "Directing or In-directing Beckett: Or What is Wrong with *Catastrophe's* Director" (2005), Sandra Wynand's "Visuality and Iconicity in Samuel Beckett's

In order to address this question, we must consider the *setting* of the play: a rehearsal. The rehearsal staged in *Catastrophe* is not, however, just any rehearsal but is a technical rehearsal, which is generally the final rehearsal prior to the dress rehearsal. Beckett, however, is not merely showing spectators how the performative sausage is made. Instead, the director and his crew are trying to ensure the stage-worthiness of the production, making subtle yet significant adjustments to assure that the audience “gets their moneys’ worth.” D is thus dominating and dehumanizing P because D knows what spectators want: a tight show. The question, then, becomes not merely one of complicity, but a darker one: are D’s actions but a reasonable response to our existing expectations as spectators?

D’s domination of P, then, should at the same time be seen as D’s anticipated response to the spectator. It is understandable that spectators want a tight show – otherwise, it would not be worthy of our attention, much less the stage – but what if spectators value performance, precision, and efficiency above all else? Does the theatre as a result become less a laboratory where experiments can be conducted, where the risk of failure always remains present, and more a venue predicated on the attainment of certain goals? Does the theatre become less about what spectators contribute and more about existing agreements between the spectator and the performance? Could D be seen, then, as responding to spectators’ valuation of efficiency and precision? Henry Mintzberg, writing but a few months after the Avignon première of *Catastrophe*, offered the following insights regarding efficiency:

The call to ‘be efficient’ is the call to calculate, where calculation means economizing, means treating social costs as externalities, and means *allowing*

Catastrophe” (2005), and Matthew Davies’s “‘Someone is looking at me still’: The Audience-Creature Relationship in the Theatre Plays of Samuel Beckett” (2009).

economic benefits to push out social ones. At the limit, efficiency emerges as one pillar of an ideology that worships economic goals, sometimes with *immoral* consequences. Thus efficiency, that 'completely neutral' concept...gets a bad name (105, emphases mine).

While efficiency can be seen as a recognition of limits, such as limits of time, energy, attention, and agency, a difference remains between efficiency as a behavior and efficiency as part of an ideology that implicitly allows almost anything so long as goals are met and agreements are maintained. D thus dismisses any obligation to treat P well and focuses solely on the economics of the theatre: making sure the audience gets what it wants. Furthermore, by valorizing precision and efficiency above all else, spectators unknowingly replicate the authoritarian logic that keeps dissidents like Havel, those who upset the precise machinations of the state, incarcerated.

What P's gaze denotes, then, is both a call to remember and a call to respond. Instead of "rob[bing spectators]...of the illusion that they are the sources of their own subjective response to their theatre-going experience," his gaze forces them to contemplate how the spectacle in front of them is shaped by their expectations and the economic consequences of those expectations (Owens 2003, 78). P's staring at spectators thus sears his suffering into the spectators' minds, asking them to question if the sort of theatre they want is one predicated on efficiency regardless of its human costs. This implicit posing of a question is reminiscent of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, which asked spectators what sort of collective they wanted to be a part of while also rethinking the relationship between collaboration and complicity, as well as the end of Arden's *Armstrong's Last Goodnight*, which prompted spectators to examine the

methods by which they form collectivities. *Catastrophe* adds to this line of inquiry by directing spectators' attention to the theatre itself, prompting them to think about how their expectations can make them unwitting accomplices in the suffering of others. At the same time, however, it can be seen as an invitation to hold P's gaze, to meet his eyes with ours and to thus consider the manner by which theatre, while needing precision and efficiency, relies on acts of connection and openness: the sharing of a particular space for a particular time with those very different from, or perhaps strangely similar to, oneself. *Catastrophe* thus demonstrates how spectators can collaborate – rightly or wrongly, constructively or destructively – through their expectations just as much as they can through their actions.

Catastrophe stages the movement between domination and resistance, between complicity and response, in a manner reminiscent of Rancière's discussion of the relationship between police order and politics. Rancière defines the police as those social forces possessing the power to determine what is visible, what is sayable, what is worthy of attention and what is devoid of meaning. The political, as he states in "Ten Theses on Politics" (2001), is a distribution of the sensible that remains "first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable," an attempt to reconfigure that which is worth looking at or listening to (§7).

Catastrophe, then, stages this relationship with D and his attempts to determine how the audience views P, and with P's final moment of resistance that causes the applause to falter and then die. Beckett adroitly draws spectators' attention to this struggle while also preventing them from too easily identifying with the dissensual. If one deems D to be acting in an exclusionary manner that dictates what is worthy of being seen or heard, then the fact remains that the way D distributes the sensible may be nothing more than a response to what spectators expect and

want. Likewise, if one deems P as a dissensual figure, then the fact remains that one must respond to him. This is not to equate politics with communicative action, but to demonstrate that the political “makes visible that which had no reason to be seen, it lodges one world into another” (Rancière 2001, §8). P presses spectators to *look* at him, to meet his gaze and to recognize that this act of looking, given the inherent activity of spectatorship, carries with it a hitherto unrecognized potentiality. A potentiality, as it turns out, that spectators’ prior expectations may have been guilty of continually eliding up until this very moment.

Beckett provides a glimpse of this potentiality as well as a glimpse of that which seeks to proscribe it. *Catastrophe*, then, resembles *Quad*, which “presents a nightmarish world...[where actors] go through [their] petty paces and then are banished,” a world in which, however, “individuals manage to assert themselves by those human variations, however minimal, within the work’s otherwise rigidly prescribed movements” (Homan 1992, 41). *Catastrophe* not only “highlights [spectators’] complicity with the events they have just witnessed,” it also provides a moment of response, an opportunity for spectators to respond and reflect (McTighe 2013, 116). As mentioned earlier, however, Beckett provides no parameters for that response, instead charging spectators with the need to find a way to respond. The choice must be audience members’ own as to how they engage with what they see – and what in turn sees them – onstage.

Beckett thus provides a chance for the audience to not only conduct experiments, but to turn the theatre space into a working laboratory. Instead of the author, the staging, or theatre professionals being providing an experimental, laboratorial space for spectators to conduct

experiments, *Catastrophe* solely places spectators in the position of experimental creators, as they must be the one who creates the laboratory. Instead of the staging, direct address, or inclusion into the performance being the driving labor-oratorical force through which spectators work to find their own voices, *Catastrophe* provides something rather different. It as if Beckett provides the bare necessities, the building and the equipment for a laboratory, but charges spectators with the task of inhabiting this laboratory, learning to operate the equipment, and working together to make something happen. Given that *Catastrophe* depicted how theatrical collaborations should *not* occur, Beckett now seems to be suggesting that audience members' responses to the intense stare of P could inaugurate a new sort of theatre, a theatre fully aware of and committed to its labor-oratorical roots.

The theatre thus becomes something that audience members can, by rethinking their expectations and reaffirming their commitment, undoubtedly make anew. The question, Beckett suggests, is what sort of experiments are spectators willing to conduct in order to ensure that this remaking occurs in a way that does not replicate past mistakes? While that is a question that Beckett remains unwilling, if not incapable, of answering, it nonetheless remains a question that challenges spectators even to this day. This "work[ing] on the nerves of the audience" and preparing them to respond may have been the most liberating thing Beckett did for his spectators.

Talking back, Beckett suggests, does not merely create a new sort of spectatorship; it is the inaugurating principle of the theatre itself. Just as Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, "No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death" (1984, 293), the spectator provides "the occasion...the reasons why" performances occur (Handke 21). Beyond those simple facts,

however, remains the need for the audience to be an “echo” and inhabit its role in a thoughtful, daring way. Throughout this study, I have demonstrated not just my own confidence, but the confidence that interwar and postwar dramatists had in spectators’ ability to do just that.

Talking back serves as a reminder of the inherent activeness of spectatorship and the potentiality spectators possess, an activeness and potentiality without which the theatre would be all the poorer. Peter Brook, in his seminal essay *The Empty Space* (1968) stated that he could “take any empty space and call it a bare stage” (1). What I hope to remind readers and theatregoers is that without spectators talking back in some fashion, an empty space is all that a bare stage can ever hope to be.

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